University of Alberta

Coining Humor: Forms of Conversion and the Making of Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America

by

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather

Henry H. Epp

with love

Abstract

In its broadest sense, this dissertation theorizes the role of the thriving late-nineteenth-century humor industry in the emergence of U.S. mass culture. Working from a cultural materialist theory that stresses the impact of material and economic processes on literary production, I trace humor's impact on popular discourses and industries that directed mass culture's future. To this end, I employ a methodological focus on forms of conversion – dialectical processes through which things and ideas are changed materially and ideologically – to emphasize that what have come to be seen as natural relations between humor, nationality and popular literature are not inevitable. My objectives in this study are fourfold: 1) to document scenes of humor production vital to United States literary history that can stand in for larger scenes of cultural and literary activity in the nineteenth century; 2) to intervene in nationalist and exceptionalist academic debates, mostly within North American cultural and literary studies, that miss the humor industry's significance for U.S. literature and mass culture; 3) to bring cultural materialist theory and methodology to bear on the history of humor practice; and 4) to imagine nineteenth-century literature and mass culture as unfinished, dynamic projects that still pressure politics, literature and culture in the twenty first century

In the introduction I establish the ground work of the project as a whole, articulating my goals as outlined above and explaining my theoretical commitment to cultural materialist inquiry. Through a reading of humor in one month's advertising section in *Scribner's*, I take stock of humor's relationship to advertising and provide a brief example of the kind of work I undertake throughout the project. Part One in two

chapters extends the issues raised in the introduction by interrogating an academic tradition of nationalizing humor practice, and a mass culture tradition of selling humor stereotypes, that both convert humor practices into the matter of national and racial identities. Part Two in two chapters shifts the focus to the production of humor within specific institutional and professional settings in the 1890s.

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Introduction: Fantasies of Production in the Humor Industry

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.
>
> -Walter Benjamin

Humor by the Yard

The back of the April 1897 issue of *Century* magazine includes a very short story by Charles Barttell Loomis titled "The Dialect Store." Written for that quality publication's humor department, "In Lighter Vein," Loomis's piece chronicles a newspaper writer's dream for the quick production of entertaining news and humor pieces within the ubiquitous late-nineteenth-century mass print industry. The fantasy posits a Fifth Avenue "dialect shop" where professional writers or even striving newcomers could purchase quantified, commodified dialect. Like the department stores and magazines that are metonyms of emerging 1890s U.S. mass culture, the dialect shop is broken up into discrete departments staffed by salespeople eager to secure profit for the store by pitching particular wares. Here, a floorwalker guides a journalist who can purchase "all kinds of dialect sold by the yard, the piece, or in quantities to suit" (958). Departments sort this abundance of factory-made products according to a wide range of popular generic types: Scotch, Swedish, Negro, Western, German, French-Canadian, Jewish, Yankee, Irish, English, and Tough. Celebrity book writers and well-known authors for other quality humor departments frequent the store, as the salespeople are quick to inform our writer: Ian Maclaren has almost emptied the store of some "shop-worn," "gude auld Scotch wi' the smell o' the heather on it" that is now available at a reduced price; "Tawmus Nelson Page buys a heap er stuff right yer" at the Negro dialect counter; and "James Whitcomb Riley had just engaged the whole output of the plant" to produce reams of Western dialect. The customer-cum-journalist concludes his narrative by explaining his wish that the dream were real so that he could "find the store again" in order to become "the greatest dialect-writer of the age." His plan is subject, however, to one condition: "if I could get goods on credit there" (958-9).

Loomis's story marks a range of issues at stake in the 1890s United States humor industry even as it remains an instance of that industry's output. Criticizing the commodification of humor writing and the industrial-like practices of humor writers (their imagined professional and artistic distance from more literary writing, and their imagined proximity to writing from the "fiction factory"), the story revels in a fantasy in which mass production serves the writer striving for professional legitimacy within a genteel ideology. The newspaperman's complex desire for and derision of this literary manufactory is captured by the pleasant salesmanship and special structure of department stores that mystify the production of dialect (locating that production in an obscure "plant") and crassly quantify writing. This mystification and quantification is humorously signified by writing's gross conversion into inches, pieces and yards anonymously produced and available at "reduced rates." The last condition for dialect-writing success, that he secure credit, gestures unmistakably towards the dream's critique of the writer's desire to be liberated from the necessity of writing and his pedestrian need for credit to realize this desire. In this dream a literary livelihood and great repute can be earned through careful shopping and credit, while the writing process can be streamlined for the professional author wary of work and seeking genteel credibility. Loomis imagines, with trepidation and delight, a distinctly modern process of literary production facilitated by an industrial conversion of humor's absent raw material into quantifiable pieces available for purchase, subject to one last easy conversion by the professional writer willing to engage in credit practices.

Although the story expresses both hope and anxiety over an imagined distance between the writer and the raw materials of dialect, the result of modern inchoate processes of mass production, it also illustrates how the nineteenth-century U.S. humor writer's craft was itself understood as a subject of interest for magazine humor readers. Loomis presumes the reader's interest in the labor of writing and capacity for understanding how a glut of dialect literature in books, newspapers and magazines reflected the conditions of modern authoring and its market (even as his satire reverses the role of the writer from that of producer to consumer). Thus, although Loomis represents the conversion of humorous speech into materials produced by the yard as a bizarre fantasy, nevertheless that conversion does capture the actual production of print from raw material into writer's labor into manuscript into type into (measurable and commodified) reams of print copy. Loomis's literal and figurative "yards" of dialect, then, register how the process of producing writing, and modern conditions of sales, labor and credit, were part of "the story" in the 1890s.

"The story," however, includes more than Loomis's writing and his presumptuous selection of raw material, for "The Dialect Store" appears in an immediate print context that tells its own narrative of humor production. Two poems at the beginning of "In

Lighter Vein" and a cartoon at its end frame Loomis's tale (figures 1 and 2). The initial poem, by one of the first widely read African-American poets, Paul Laurence Dunbar, participates in a humor industry genre known as the "coon craze" that Henry B. Wonham identifies as itself profiting on a larger craze for ethnic caricature in late-nineteenth-century America. Written as a kind of light song or ditty, "On the Road" tells from the first-person perspective, and in recognizable "negro dialect," the humorous tale of a man resisting his fear of the night while on a journey to visit his lover. Professionally conforming to the profitable stereotype, our traveler, who "whistles so's [he] won't be feared," encounters shapes and sounds that are likely "to skeer [him] half to def" (958). The second poem, "Jean the Chopper," by minor poet Francis Sterne Palmer, narrates the tale of Jean de Chambeau, who "swings his ax" and enjoys his strenuous, simple labor, as the genteel reader can infer from Jean's singing: "His yodel rings a laughing rhyme:/ To-day the depths of the shadowy wood/ To Jean the Chopper seem gay and good" (958). The cartoon fixed immediately below the end of "The Dialect Store" is titled "A Seizure in the Jungle." Drawn by W.D. Stevens, the piece depicts a group of apes conversing. In the background, a perturbed elephant is anchored to the ground by another ape wrapped around its trunk. Accompanying text explains the incongruity: "I say, Uncle Boon, what's the row?" UNCLE BOON: "Why, the elephant owes my sister for cocoanut [sic] milk, and Bab is going to hold his trunk until he pays" (959).[1]

This print frame neatly indexes the wide range of genres produced for 1890s humor departments and the ties that bind them together, while the four pieces register the complex relations between writers, subjects and techniques that obtain in the humor industry. Loomis's story mocks (even as the newspaper man ambivalently desires) the dialect techniques that permit an African-American to publish in the mostly white male world of the humor industry.[2] And Stevens's cartoon plays on stereotypes regarding African-Americans -- in the early days of mass culture apes were notoriously coded references to African-Americans as animalistic, capable only of clumsy imitation when it comes to economic production and trade (Loomis's story doubly echoes the reference to "Uncle Boon" when a negro dialect counter attendant refers to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and when the newspaperman addresses this attendant as "uncle"). Dunbar's and Palmer's poems, then, take dialect and stereotypes as the opportunity for comedy and light verse, even as their own generic resources are, within the same print context, the subjects of Loomis's humorous criticism of dialect humor writing. More than signaling the obvious political nature of humor industry productions, the links between these four pieces are instances of how much the humor industry, like other emerging mass culture industries, took its own practices of production, and its own relations to economics, politics, and popular discourses, as the objects, subjects and materials of its work.

And the newspaperman's dream tells at least one more tale, one perhaps more appropriate to an expression of the unconscious. For his "dialect shop," organized by department, maintains a curious relation to the *Century* Magazine, since, as Richard Ohmann notes, the term "magazine" finds its root in the French word for store, "magasin," and the magazine was itself also organized by departments. The structure of magazines registers the close connection between department stores and these print institutions, a connection especially close in the final decade of the nineteenth century, when both were emerging as powerful emblems of, and instances of, mass culture in the United States. Taking these relations into account, I read the dream as expressing anxiety over how magazines (and newspapers), invested in securing profit on a mass scale through a complex web of new advertising and circulation technologies, blur the distinction between the creative act of writing and the industrial act of printing. The place of the writer in this new process of print production, in which writing is only one increasingly indistinguishable step, is thus in danger of simply disappearing into a rationalized, material process of production that reduces literature to yards of print and paper. In this reading, the ridiculous conceit of the dialect store, as fantastic as it may sound, becomes uncanny: disturbing not because it is so different from reality, but because it is not different enough.[3]

In its broadest sense, this dissertation theorizes the role of the thriving late-nineteenth-century humor industry in the emergence of U.S. mass culture. Working from a cultural materialist theory that stresses the impact of material and economic processes on literary production, I trace humor's impact on popular discourses and industries that directed mass culture's future. To this end, I employ a methodological focus on forms of conversion – dialectical processes through which things and ideas change materially and ideologically – to emphasize that what have come to be seen as natural relations between humor, nationality and popular literature are not inevitable. My objectives in this study are fourfold: 1) to document scenes of humor production vital to United States print history that can stand in for larger scenes of cultural and literary activity in the nineteenth century; 2) to intervene in nationalist and exceptionalist academic debates, mostly within North American cultural and literary studies, that miss the humor industry's significance for U.S. literature and mass culture; 3) to bring cultural materialist theory and methodology to bear on the history of humor practice; and 4) to imagine popular literary genres and mass culture as unfinished, dynamic projects still subject to political, literary, popular, and utopian pressures.[4]

Cultural Materialism & Forms of Conversion

When I began theorizing the relations between materiality and humor, in an effort to ask questions traditionally ignored by humor scholars invested in American Humor Studies (see chapter one), psychoanalysis, and anthropology, I engaged a "new materialism" put forward by Bill Brown in *The Material Unconscious, Things,* and *A Sense of Things*. The value of new materialism for humor studies, I felt, was its challenging effort to theorize the illogical and accidental, rather than the logical and instrumental, in literary and mass culture, in addition to its exciting currency in American Studies and material culture studies debates. Brown's most crucial move for my project, I felt, was to situate the observation that culture is material not as an end of, but rather as a beginning to, analysis. This was especially motivating since it encouraged me to move beyond simplistic observations that humor practices always involved a material dimension and instead to focus on what that material dimension meant for humor practice in mass culture.

In *The Material Unconscious*, for instance, Brown challenges historians and critics to practice a material and literary analysis sensitive to that which many forms of historical analysis ignore, a danger my material culture approach to humor practice itself threatened. Explicitly critiquing New Historicism for its inability to manage diachronic historical relations, and also for its tendency to theorize historical forces as somehow outside history, Brown imagines an alternative theory that stresses history as the noninevitable result of struggles and contests. Taking Walter Benn Michaels's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* as representative of New Historicist impulses to imagine a fixed form in (or rather, outside) history, Brown writes:

> What happens in the closing chapter of *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* is an effort to effect historiographic closure by arresting the dialectic of necessity and contingency, agency and accident, within a stable structure named "the market" – or, rather, by suspending them where they vertiginously and specularly play, appearing as one another in an increasingly "familiar pattern of substitution." Such instabilities never threaten to destabilize the structure, "the market," within which they play because the structure itself is not at play. Whatever happens, nothing happens to the market…. The point is that because the New Historicist project cannot bear diachronic relations…. causation must be bracketed. By the same token, the accidental must be bracketed because the idea of novelty – change, violation, excess – cannot be tolerated. But in both cases they are bracketed not in the facile sense of being excluded but in the potent sense of being named and neutralized, projected onto (or into) the stable object being addressed. (98)

Here, accidents in history that betray excess and illogic are mobilized as yet more instances of history's overbearing logic: "nothing accidental can happen *to* the market because accidents happen only *within* the market" (99, emphasis original). The challenge for the new materialist is to apply pressure to moments of excess, on accidents that set history's illogic in relief and betray history's noninevitability.

New materialism, then, seeks to break from histories of "consumption," particularly current in American Studies engagements with the 1890s, that fix accident, practice and belief in a tired relation to simplistic models of complicity, resistance, and value. As Brown notes, already in 1988 theorists like Meaghan Morris "lamented the 'banality of cultural studies' resulting from the proliferation of empirical affirmations of the same point about 'the politics of consumption': that, 'taking the side of the audience,' we can show how the private reception of 'complex and contradictory' mass-cultural texts is 'complex and contradictory'" ("Global Bodies" 38). Work on commodity/consumer culture fruitfully traces how mass culture organized itself in its decade of emergence in the United States, but such work also threatens to read this culture as *single* and *fixed*. For such theory, one may be complicit with or resistant to consumerism, but, either way, one operates only within a fixed (though emerging) totalized culture: one's relation to commodities always takes place under the determinations of a commodity culture under capitalism. A new materialism challenges these models of consumption, complicity and resistance by tracing how a commodity may exceed its "identity" within history and become something else, something outside even the realm of value.[5] As Brown writes, "We might thus, while recognizing the 'cultural work' that literature consciously strives to accomplish, look outside that instrumentalizing frame to sense how the play of the text can foreground the conditions of such 'work'" (18).

All of this was helpful, except for the very important fact that as my research proceeded, I became more and more interested in cultural work, instrumentalization, consumption, and value. While I still recognize the force of Brown's new materialism, and remain excited by its potential for humor studies (especially insofar as it provides an avenue for understanding humor when it fails), I found myself consistently asking questions more relevant to the "old" materialism, or, more precisely, to the cultural materialism of Raymond Williams: I wanted to understand the material process of humor production in the United States, especially in relation to a mass culture crucially formed to secure profit under capitalism. My focus on humor practice in the 1890s, after all, came out of a desire to understand how humor was produced in the decade of mass culture's emergence in the U.S. and, by extension, to tell the history of how humor is produced in the present. The questions and politics of a new materialism, though they might importantly inform a future project on U.S. humor practice, became more of an encumbrance than an aid, though I tried always to remember Brown's important caution, key to his powerful and entirely convincing critique of the work of new historicism, that too often material and economic critiques ascribe a totalizing logic to capitalism.

So I turned instead to the "old" cultural materialism articulated by Raymond Williams in works such as *Culture and Society* and *Marxism and Literature*. Here I found an explicitly politicized approach to culture (seeking equitable distribution of "property, remuneration, education and respect" [329]) that would permit me to theorize the materiality of humor practice in the United States and still, to some extent at least, recognize the kind of complexity Brown argued for in his new materialism. Williams' approach took "the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which a culture is woven" (*Culture and Society* 269), but recognized that economic structure was not entirely determining of culture (281) and that, though culture is material, "a culture can never be reduced to its artifacts while it is being lived" (323). Perhaps most importantly, the primary goal of his cultural materialist inquiry, which I knew I could only hope to approach in my dissertation, was my own real goal: the "restoration of the whole social material process, and specifically of cultural production as social and material" (*Marxism and Literature* 138). This seemed at first, to an ambitious graduate student, like a step backwards from Brown's exciting new materialism, but also like a step I felt it was necessary for me to take. Cultural materialism is also an approach which I have come to feel already embraces, to some extent, the warnings of new materialism, especially insofar as Williams recognizes "the complex unity of the elements" of culture and advocates for the analysis of "the interrelationships within this complex unit" (149-50).

Thus my approach to humor practice in the 1890s is informed by cultural materialist analysis over and above (to the extent that such assessments are meaningful) Brown's new materialism. My engagements in the project with nationalism, material culture, magazine history, and print culture, though they take up different questions and stress particular kinds of cultural and material analysis, nonetheless all cohere around the methodology, politics and theory of cultural materialism. It is regrettable that cultural materialism has been almost entirely ignored by American Humor Studies, the nationalist, exceptionalist, and white supremacist history of which I discuss in my first chapter, but this omission does imbue my dissertation with an element of currency and innovation.

While the project is thus informed to a large extent by long-established modes of critical inquiry, it does attempt to place a new stress on what I call "forms of conversion" that crucially direct the material social process of production of humor in the 1890s. A theoretical and methodological focus on forms of conversion obtains in current modes of materialist analysis that stress the pressure material objects and processes exert on history. As commodity culture theorist John Frow explains, "much of the most interesting writing on material culture in recent years has been concerned with the conversion processes by which things pass from one state into another" (284). Frow deliberately deploys the terms "state" and "things" in their broadest sense, referring to the widest possible range of modes of being. In this formulation, tracking forms of conversion may include work "on the complex trajectories of things in their passage from one regime of value to another" and on "the 'entanglement' of things, and system of things, in the colonial encounter" (284). This eminently interdisciplinary methodological focus, in turn, lends "support to [Nicholas] Thomas' critique of 'the essentialist notion that the identity of material things is fixed in their structure and form'" (284). Tracking the *forms* that shape conversions, insofar as "form" is that which gives shape to conversions, means tracking the mechanisms not only by which meaning is *constructed* but by which the "materials" out of which meaning is produced (and onto which meaning is produced) are even conceived of as available for "construction."[6]

Understanding material processes through the lens of "forms of conversion" involves a difficult, and perhaps ultimately too difficult, wrestling with the definitions of two very widely resonant terms: "form" and "conversion." "Form" can gesture towards a "formalism" that I do not intend and that in fact I explicitly reject as a means of engaging cultural production in history. Formalism is a poor spectre for my terminology to raise especially insofar as I sometimes use the term "form" of conversion when I perhaps more precisely mean "process" of conversion; "formalism," especially as practiced by the

Russian formalist school of the early decades of the twentieth century, places emphasis on "the specific, intrinsic characteristics of a literary work" (138-9) rather than on material processes of production. But I think the term "form" is worth keeping, since it can resonate in a meaningful relation to cultural materialist inquiry. As Williams defines the term in *Keywords*, "form" can mean "an essential shaping principle" (138) that brings matter into being (198). In my deployment of the term "form," then, I rely heavily on this latter definition, following again the direction pointed to by Williams, who writes:

> What was more interesting, but still extremely difficult, was the notion of form.... as a shaping principle, either in its widest sense (where it overlapped with *genre*) or in its most specific sense, where it was a discoverable organizing principle within a work.... With this sense of form.... the *Marxist* emphasis could be reasonably described as a formalism of content.... and different questions could be asked about the real formation.... of a work. (139)

When I discuss "forms of conversion," I mean both "processes" of conversion, and "forms of processes of conversion," that is, the material methods by which matter is converted into humor *and* the underlying principle that gives shape to that process, an economic and cultural principle that is, in U.S. mass culture, crucially capitalist.

The term "conversion" also involves a level of complexity that may ultimately render it too cumbersome. I want to keep it in this project, however, precisely because its complexity is an invitation to work out in meticulous (and sometimes labored) terms how I intend to approach humor practice. I should mention first, however, that while I deploy "conversion" broadly, I do not intend the term to resonate on a religious level, though this might be a productive avenue for inquiry in another project. Like Frow, I deploy the term, for the most part, in a specifically material culture studies sense. I would like the term to resonate in tension, however, with a more established, and more properly cultural studies, term which other readers have often raised when thinking through conversion: "mediation."

My effort to track forms of conversion, especially in its emphasis on the *processes* of cultural production, is deeply indebted to theories of mediation. Like "forms of conversion," "mediation" can refer to processes of conversion that stand in between objects and processes; mediation can refer to "the object itself, not something between the object and that to which it is brought" (Adorno qtd. in Williams 206); and mediation can refer to a theory and methodology that emphasizes history's noninevitability by pinpointing history's constitutive intermediaries.

In his work on mobility in nineteenth century U.S. culture, Mark Simpson defines mediation through Regis Debray's term "mediology," emphasizing mobility's active production in history by and as social contest. Here, "'mediation'.... works two ways at once, serving as a descriptive term with which to characterize the material status and effect of mobility, and as a critical tool with which to analyze and critique the seeming naturalness of the division or indeed reification of the material and social forms of human movement under capital" (*Trafficking Subjects* xxii). Simpson deploys mediation methodologically, effecting analysis that challenges the "naturalness" of a form of conversion and theorizing history as the product (and practice) of contest. Debray's "mediological" method, and Simpson's work on contest, may be understood as partners to a cultural materialist program insofar as the mediological method points to moments, practices and agents of mediation that modify culture. The mediological, as Debray argues,

> would consist *in multiplying the bridges that can be thrown up between the aesthetic and the technological*.... Such bridges are established in practice between subjects and objects which in each epoch construct one another. We must remind the sociologist, on the one hand, that there are real objects, that they have a history and that this material history is decisive; and the *student of technology*, on the other, that the decisive history of formal procedures and machines is not solitary, and that no technical innovation can take place without just as soon being mediated by its milieu and social relations. (*Media Manifestos* 137-38; emphases original)

Mediology indicates forms of conversion that *stand in* between raw materials and their product, and that *constitute* the object, even as it rightly emphasizes how the "raw materials" subject to transformation are themselves always the products of previous transformations in history.

Mediation also sets in relief what tracking forms of conversion offers cultural materialism: a productive emphasis on transformation that, because of its broad definition, permits ways of imagining processes of cultural production *as processes* and not as the lumbering agents of unavoidable synchrony. The breadth with which I understand "forms of conversion" risks obscuring by conflating actual processes of production through its deliberately imprecise reference to a wide range of processes (indeed, almost any cultural practice or event could be understood as a form of conversion). Here, naming a process a "form of conversion" risks stopping analysis because such naming can be mistaken for the end of analysis rather than its heuristic beginning. Indeed, one of the driving points behind Brown's new materialism is a desire to resist the tendency among materialist histories to stop, rather than begin, at the observation that history and culture are material. But this risk, while serious, obtains in many other prominent historical theories and methodologies, including the dialectical, the mediational, the constructivist, and the performatist, all of which threaten to halt their analyses by naming broad forms of cultural production in history. Thus any effort to practice cultural materialism through a methodological focus on forms of conversion needs to do the difficult work of identifying what converting process is under analysis and articulating what relation it bears to history. To put this in the terms employed by Judith Butler (after J.L. Austin) in *Excitable Speech*, my cultural materialist approach needs to understand forms of conversion not as illocutionary but as perlocutionary; that is, my cultural materialist history will not work to produce a name for a process but instead to produce a link between the "object" or "process" under analysis and its name. Naming a process or mode of production a "form of conversion" must be understood not as a simplistic end of analysis but as the initial move in a vigorous challenge to the historian to articulate the features of that process.

In sum: throughout this dissertation, I track "forms of conversion" in the broadest but still resolutely materialist sense in which this phrase can be understood. "Conversion" means working out the process of transformation by which an object or subject becomes something else, something heuristically understood to have been turned into something other than what it originally was, and "conversion" also means conversion-as-mediation in the way Williams and others have defined it, as material social processes necessary, and not secondary, to the object or subject under analysis. In turn, "form" means that which gives shape to processes of conversion, that which is, in the first instance, ideological. Identifying these forms and processes, and submitting them to analysis, involves stumbles, arrests, and surprises, but what I lose from this effort to place a new stress on cultural materialist analysis I gain in another sense, insofar as I practice, to gesture towards a phrase of Brown's, my commitment that historical analysis remain as unfinished and noninevitable as the shards it submits to analysis.

Reading Dimensions

In the late nineteenth century, a vibrant humor industry provided entertainment media, including stage shows, lyceum lectures, books, and newspapers, with seemingly limitless opportunities for accruing capital. Even magazines devoted to more conventional reporting and literature responded to humor's wide popularity and transformed this cultural currency into increased circulation and profit. Indeed, the still close relationship between advertising and humor was partly built upon the premise that an established mass culture exercise like humor could help direct and manage new reading and viewing practices emerging with mass advertising at the end of the century. Tellingly, elite *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *The Century Magazine* and *Scribner's Magazine* recognized humor's profitable potential by maintaining humor departments situated at the back of their publications, either adjacent to their respective rear advertising sections or, in the case of *Scribner's*, actually inside that section. These regularly recurring departments provided the entertainment readers had come to expect from magazines and, in turn, provided advertisers with the tools to gauge and manage their audience. A close relationship between humor and advertising obtains in many mass print productions of the period, but this relationship in elite magazines casts into relief the ubiquity and productivity of humor and advertising's symbiotic pairing during the emergence of mass culture.

In this section I write a short case study of the role a "humor industry" played in forms of conversion that constitute the U.S. mass culture emerging at the end of the nineteenth century. Through a reading of humor in one month's advertising section in *Scribner's*, I will take stock of humor's relationship to advertising and provide a brief introduction to the kind of work I undertake throughout the project. This analysis, which I intend to resonate through the dissertation, will highlight how popular magazines in the United States converted humor into advertising. Analyzing advertising from this period for how it imagined and practiced humor's relation to profit captures once again how writers and editors produced a relationship between humor and capital and how that relationship could be harnessed through particular forms of conversion. Perhaps more importantly, in this reading I will put the concept of forms of conversion into practice when I "grant dimensionality" to coincidences and connections between various advertisements and their layout, "confronting" an "image" of the humor industry that renders the "text as a whole, and its moment in history, newly legible" (*Material Unconscious* 18).

The institutional context for elite magazines in the 1890s was in many ways typical of such contexts in the mass culture industry as it was to emerge: readerly expectations were acknowledged, and also directed, by crafty editors, writers, and illustrators interested in turning a profit through the production and sale of advertising in widely distributed print. Since magazines already responded through their editorial material to audience desires while working to shape those desires, advertising and magazines were well suited to promoting each other's interests in accruing capital while (sometimes rather "unscientifically") engineering a predictable marketplace. Ellen Gruber Garvey outlines with compelling detail how magazines in the 1890s manufactured numerous reading practices in the interests of profit-driven brand name companies, asserting that "readers of advertising were encouraged to see mass-produced products as not just compatible with, but even the material for, constructing their own individuality" (186). Here, editors manage the creation of the modern subject under mass culture by defining that subject as bearing a precise relationship to the products of mass culture – a relationship whereby mass-produced products were converted into the materials for manufacturing an "individual" identity. Not surprisingly, this imagined relationship carries vast potential for accruing capital to editors, advertisers, and mass manufacturers, while providing readers with relief from anxieties about their place in the modern world (even as those anxieties are encouraged, and sometimes outright created, by advertisers and editors themselves). Historians of the period have documented this wide institutional context for magazines, but too often they dismiss elite magazines as attending less to their readership than the usually more exciting, explicitly market-oriented, cheap magazines like *Munsey's* or *The Ladies' Home Journal.* This assumption often plays into narratives promoted by elite magazines that represented editorial procedures as guided more by national or genteel measures of achievement than by profit. Not surprisingly, this assumption often neglects histories that tell a different story.[7] For example, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* was from the beginning conceived of as a print circular for selling Harper's Brothers books, and though the magazine did at times take its readers' tastes for granted (often in the not so naïve view that the magazine itself shaped those tastes), nonetheless, as agents of a widely distributed, popular magazine, the magazine's editors, writers and "admen" always took readership and profitability into consideration.

The humor wedged between the magazine's editorial content and its rear advertising section provides a particularly revealing example of these emerging, politically charged practices and relationships between magazines, advertising and readers. The humor department's print location at the back, which was already something of a tradition by the 1890s, took on new meanings as the century waned and mass culture waxed. The relationship between advertising and humor departments, that is to say, took on a special significance due to their contiguous print locations (that are always the result of editorial layout decisions). Humor departments already did much work to entertain readers and build relationships of familiarity with them, but when adjacent to so much advertising these departments worked their capacity for directing and managing readers to increase profit for magazines and for advertisers. Humor and advertising fit well for a number of reasons: as Ohmann suggests of the emerging advertising strategies of the 1890s, "jokes and puns (already common in advertising) imply an audience that will know how to interpret them, and share the fun" (191) and in this implication simultaneously flatter and build readerships. In an elite magazine, then, appreciating the joke becomes the currency of matriculation to a desirable racial, national and class status. Further, as James Playsted Wood suggests in his industrial-insider overview of United

States magazines, "publishers like to think, and their promotion managers often claim, that some of the confidence readers have in an established magazine's editorial content, some of the warmth aroused in the reader by humor, human interest, and sturdy thinking, is transferred to the advertising pages" (321), an effect pronounced, I might add, if those pages immediately follow or are mixed with the humor department. This latter point is striking since many magazine histories neglect to mention that, since magazines (even elite magazines) relied as much or more on advertising revenue as sales, their ultimate end was as much to influence advertisers into thinking magazines were good investments as it was to influence readers into regularly and predictably purchasing magazines.

A fine example of how this relationship between humor, advertising and magazines was practiced appears in the rear advertising section of the *Scribner's Magazine* issue of June 1896. I select this particular example because it constitutes an important *instance* of how these relationships were imagined and of how humor was converted into the helpmeet of advertising. This material is particularly useful since while many mass magazines ran their humor departments at the back of their editorial material, immediately adjacent to their rear advertising sections, *Scribner's* actually ran its humor department throughout the rear advertising section. This editorial practice registers one example of how editors and advertisers imagined a relationship between humor and advertising, and it also points to how differentiating between humor and advertising was at times discouraged by the emerging discourse of advertising and by magazine layout.

The first advertisement I want to analyze is an ad for Richmond Bicycles that depicts two medieval knights jousting while riding Richmond's distinctly modern products (figure 3). The ad plays into a common association between humor and bicycles in the 1890s (the new "fad" of bicycling was constantly subject to humorous discussion in mass print journalism and fiction) even as it recalls and trades on the humor-by-anachronism of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.*[8] Readers scanning the section for bicycle ads may have their attention drawn by the absurd, funny anachronism, the clever depiction of movement captured by the subtle lines drawn inside the wheels and the flowing headpieces, or even by the violent spearing of the knight on the left. And perhaps more to the point, readers scanning the section for its humorous editorial material may be drawn to the ad by momentarily *mistaking* it for a cartoon. If any doubt remains as to Ohmann's claim that the emergence of modern advertising discourse should be pushed back to the 1890s from where scholarly consensus had previously located it (sometime in the teens and twenties of the next century), this ad's illustration and complex print location should suggest once again how relatively sophisticated advertising techniques associated with the later period were already in play at this time, even if the details of their implementation were coarse.

Four pages later the first example of an actual editorial cartoon appears (figure 4). Titled "Humor in the Bush," the piece depicts three caricatured black people, dressed in stereotyped jungle clothing (one figure even clutches a spear, oddly recalling the medieval spear in the Richmond ad). Two guardsmen discuss the relative merits of the third character, "Gumbo," who is "bowlegged," for the position of treasurer. This part of the joke is driven by a pun: Gumbo may not be a fine selection because he is "crooked at bottom." Very much like the cartoon from *The Century* I discuss above, this joke turns on "coon" comedy through its stereotyped, exaggerated drawing and through its insinuation that black people are capable only of gross literalization when it comes to the language of commerce. As the first editorial humor piece, "Bush's" relatively later appearance – on page 42 of the advertiser – suggests how much editors desired readers to flip through the advertiser, spending as much time as possible with the advertisements in their effort to read the cartoons. Alternatively, the relatively late appearance of this first cartoon implies how confident editors and advertisers were that readers intent on actually reading the ad section would have their attention secured without resort to comic relief.

The next page is taken up by an enormous, complex drawing starkly opposed to the relatively spare cartoon style of the Richmond ad and the "Bush" joke. Here, we see another medieval knight and yet another long phallic weapon, this time a sword (figure 5). The text, as much as the illustration, drives this ad, explaining how the grand drawing relates to the product for sale: Pabst Milwaukee Malt Extract. The ad is distinctly less "modern" than the Richmond ad because it requires a considerable time commitment from readers (rather than the quick glance of more modern advertising). The ad does, however, pick up the commercial value of humor in the text beneath the knight:

> Languid?
>
> Exhilaration, enjoyment and effervescence of spirits are the laughter of the constitution. The liver, which sets the whole mechanism of man at work, at times becomes torpid; it is then that Pabst Malt Extract, The "Best" Tonic, produces that healthful activity which reacts upon the whole system and gives a lifting, strengthening sensation, by seeking the place which needs it most. With its invigorating influence, and the blessed gift of slumber and mental balance, The

> "Best" Tonic will give courage for any undertaking, and obstacles will seem but a joyous test of energy. Take
>
> Pabst Malt Extract
>
> The "Best" Tonic

Like modern ads, this piece works to effect a magical connection between a feeling and a product, drawing on positive affective sensations like "enjoyment," "courage" and "laughter" even as it testifies to the medicinal properties of the "Best" tonic/extract/beer.[9] "Laughter" becomes the opportunity for profit by being turned into a kind of affective metaphor for the body's health.

Five pages later the second editorial humor piece appears (figure 6). The drawing depicts a stereotypical masculine, genteel, urban figure whose faddish conspicuous consumption is betrayed by modern "x-rays" that reveal a disturbingly undernourished body hidden by the sartorial accoutrements of modern wealthy urban life. The ad plays into popular fears that a kind of hyperurban lifestyle weakened the body, especially the masculine body. Modern medical equipment renders "Cholly's" display of fashion ridiculous, but while on one level the joke criticizes Cholly for practicing *the wrong kind* of consumption, on another level the joke criticizes Cholly for *not consuming enough*. The joke, in other words, very much belongs in an advertising section because of its implicit call to consume – and to consume properly. Indeed, like many a modern ad, this cartoon creates the very anxiety the products surrounding it claim to solve, like the chafing dish ad directly below it that wonderfully draws together the conspicuous consumption of expensive products and food. Here, humor draws together a number of contemporary popular discourses, mobilizing them in the interests of creating anxieties that call for the increased consumption required by mass culture even as it registers another kind of anxiety about how the body might react to the burden of urban, genteel consumption.[10]

Six pages on, the first of a five-piece cartoon series further plays on a discourse of food consumption and health (see figures 7-11). A heavyset man, consulting a presumably costly (and thin) health professional for advice, promises to prove the superiority of his common-sense notions of consumption over the professional's refined knowledge, playing on a punning double meaning of "reduction." Over the next three drawings the man becomes emaciated and disfigured, only to return in the final drawing to the professional man's office as a frightening, triumphant skeleton. The clever run of cartoons over a number of pages encourages readers interested in the joke to flip through yet more advertising material even as it directs readers to anxiously wonder at the dire consequences of their own practices of consumption. In this series, humor converts puns and ridicule into the opportunity for the production of anxieties of consumption even as humor is converted by its print location into a technology for prolonging readerly interaction with advertising material.

The next cartoon further blurs the distinction between humorous and advertising material (figure 12). In this drawing, an adult squirrel cracks nuts with a simple device while three young squirrels gaze upon this labor with varying styles of interest. Like the cartoons preceding it, this drawing takes up the top half of the page and is "explained" by some short text at the bottom. As a joke, the text parodies a popular discourse of scientific progress, rendering that discourse ridiculous by embodying its claims in the anthropomorphized behavior of diminutive, cute animals. Indeed, such mockery could pick up on the "Reductio" series' mockery of professional discovery, while the focus on food could complement both that series and the earlier "X-Ray" cartoon.

The "joke" here is not nearly so obvious as the jokes in those cartoons, however, particularly because no dialogue accompanies the scene. Furthermore, the advertising text immediately underneath the drawing (or is it contiguous with the drawing?) may be read as "explaining" the drawing. Indeed, if "Advance" is a joke, then the ad for *Infant Health* would be practically unique in this advertising section in that it is not accompanied by any illustration or entertaining typographical gloss. The text reads, under the bold headline "Don't Worry Yourself":

> and don't worry the baby: avoid both unpleasant conditions by giving the child pure, digestible food. Don't use solid preparations. *Infant Health* is a valuable pamphlet for mothers. Send your address to the New York Condensed Milk Company, New York.

Pertaining as it does to the preparation of food for children, the text relates directly to the illustration above. From this perspective, the phrase "The Advance of Science" is not a lightly mocking jab at haughty claims for the power of science but instead a cute support for those claims – a support given in order to convert the positive reputation of science into an argument for using a particular brand of condensed milk.

This reading, however, is complicated by the two dark lines separating the "Don't Worry Yourself" text from the pieces above and below it. For instance, the line above "Don't Worry Yourself" is considerably darker than the line below it, a distinction which would tend to imply "Don't" bears no relation to "Advance," or at least a closer relation to the Rubifoam ad. Indeed, this reading is supported by the fact that the previous cartoons are separated from advertisements by a thick black line much closer in appearance to that separating "Advance" and "Don't" than that separating "Don't" and "Rubifoam." The Rubifoam ad only complicates the situation because it too depicts a child and, with its emphasis on flavor and its focus on teeth, may be associated (if indirectly) to food consumption. In fact, the text that runs along the bottom of this ad sounds very much like that of a cartoon, describing as it does the action taking place in the ad: "Cupid's Discovery of the Children's Favorite Dentifrice."

But what from one perspective this ad complicates – the effort to establish whether or not "Advance" is editorial or advertising material – from another it consolidates: the page has been constructed to make a focused appeal related to children, cleanliness, and food, while drawing on the still interimplicated discourses of science and health, all through the conversion of humor into an entertainment/advertising hybrid. This effect is captured by what distinguishes "Advance" from the previous cartoons: instead of drawing on racist or hypermasculine discourse, this piece draws on tropes of cuteness, tenderness, and nurturing. Working to classify "Advance" as either advertising or editorial material neglects the perhaps more crucial point that this page has been organized to confuse simple ontological efforts to distinguish between humor and advertising in order to increase advertising's potential to attract readerly attention.

The final piece of clearly editorial humorous material in the ad section appears eight pages later, and takes up once again the violent, hypermasculine subject matter of "Cholly" and "Reductio" even as it also takes up the dialect/regional humor of "Bush." Titled "Social Amenities in Kentucky" (figure 13), this cartoon depicts the aftermath of violence in a dilapidated, wild Kentucky town. On the far right of the drawing a crowd excitedly gazes on a corpse (its boots turned up), while, immediately to its left and in the right foreground of the drawing, a dapper, hatted and moustachioed Westerner calmly makes an inquiry into the events. In the left foreground a jacketless but vested, hatted and moustachioed figure calmly cleans a menacing blade on his left shirtsleeve. The dialogue runs:

> "What is the excitement?" inquired Colonel Bludd.
>
> "No excitement at all, suh," replied the Major. "I have just been cutting an acquaintance."

Like the "Bush" cartoon, this piece derives its humor from punning, violence and dialect; and, like the "Bush" cartoon, this piece depicts dialect speakers misusing the discourse of modern urban life. Unlike "Advance," however, this cartoon does not seem situated to sell the product advertised in its immediate vicinity; indeed, the gruesome pun does little to make a reader interested in improving their complexion by purchasing Syrup of Figs.

I want to end this reading by pointing to one more ad that does not seem to convert humor into the opportunity for profit but that does produce a kind of humor nonetheless. This ad appears near the end of the section, and is yet another effort to sell Pabst Malt Extract (figure 14). Like its counterpart, this ad is characterized by a striking illustration and somewhat clunky accompanying text. Also like its counterpart, the text begins with a humorous question put forward in relatively large type. The first ad asked, "Languid?" This ad asks, "Do You Eat?" and then goes on to inquire whether the food I do eat actually gives me an appetite. These ads can be read as a kind of orchestrated response to the anxiety raised in the cartoons about inadequate food consumption – if you're anxious about your health and appearance, buy our Extract – but they can also be read as remarkably clumsy efforts to secure profit (even if Pabst is still in operation today). For where the first ad notes that "The Art of Brewing Was Developed By the Germans," this ad claims that "The History of Brewing Begins With Egypt." These phrases are not precisely contradictory – perhaps Egyptian brewing was not an art – but nonetheless a humorous inconsistency remains. Pabst's advertisers, like their modern counterparts, try to associate something compelling (say, the imperial, dignified majesty of medieval German art or the apocryphal luxury of ancient Egyptian rulers) with their product.

This reading of the *Scribner's Advertiser* is particularly appropriate for the introduction because it suggests just how much, and in what myriad, instrumental but imperfect ways mass magazines of the 1890s converted humor into the opportunity for selling products. Locating the editorial humorous material so closely to advertising produces desirable effects for the ends of advertising; drawing on relatively popular humorous discourse (bicycles and Mark Twain) adds depth to a relatively simple ad; basing humor and advertising on the same materials (food) and anxieties (about consumption) effects a kind of feedback loop between the two, blurring ontological distinctions; and stumbles in advertising produce yet another kind of laughter that provides its own kind of entertainment. In changing humor into anxiety through cultural criticism, transforming desire into humor through layout, and rendering such conversions indistinct by collapsing ontological distinctions between cartoons and promotions, this advertiser participates in forms of conversion that link mass culture's past to its present.

Coining Humor

This dissertation is about how humor practices were represented, imagined and transformed by the material processes, products and discourses of emerging mass culture in the United States. The title, *Coining Humor*, resonates doubly throughout the dissertation, signaling both the transformation of humor into money and the invention of humorous products and forms. In punning on a double meaning of "coining" as invention and as turning-to-profit, the phrase aptly points to the activity of the humor industry under capitalism even as it gestures towards the active genesis of humor in history. Placing the emphasis on "coining," furthermore, captures a signal purpose of this project, to focus on *processes* of production and *forms* of conversion as much as on the products themselves. The title's pun sets in relief a relationship between humor and money and stresses how much that relationship is the result of an ongoing history rather than an unavoidable law of the mass culture landscape.

"Coining humor" also seizes on a long established, close relationship between humor, money, and the forms of conversion that bind them together. Susan Stewart, in *Crimes of Writing*, remembers the fantasy of Richard Blackmore who proposed in his eighteenth-century criticism of wit "the establishment of a 'Bank and Mint of Wit" to ensure that it will be refined and purified" (78). Blackmore fantasizes an official institution of financial production as an appropriate model for the regulated, religiously correct manufacture of wit. While this fantasy links processes of production of wit/humor to modern institutional practices in order to make wit subject to a hyper-legal set of rules, and Loomis's "Dialect Store" fantasy links humor production to modern institutional practices in order to imagine and criticize one model of the author's role in literary production, both take the securing of capital as humor's end.

The first part of this project extends the issues raised in the introduction by interrogating an academic tradition of nationalizing humor practice, and a mass culture tradition of selling humor stereotypes, that both convert humor practices into the matter of national and racial identities. In the first chapter, after tracing the curious recurrence of a punning title for three separate humor anthologies, *The Mirth of a Nation*, I critique the history of American Humor Studies and situate my research in relation to the practices of this academic literary subfield. Rather than articulating my approach to the late-nineteenth-century humor industry as a point of intervention in AHS, however, I argue for my project as a break from what up to now has remained a relatively unchallenged assumption within AHS that literary and folk humor practices in United States history are an index for a unique, essentialized "American character." By tracing this assumption back to popular late-nineteenth-century efforts to imagine humor's relation to identity, I emphasize the impact this form of conversion has had on mass culture and on academic inquiry even as I suggest this form itself constitutes an instance of mass culture -- and another instance of how much some academic work has uncritically participated in nationalist projects of essentialism and exceptionalism. What this chapter makes clear is that the *process* of identity production (conceived of here as a form of conversion) is as much a part of ideology as the product itself (identity). The chapter is more than a summary of the literature, however, since its last section proposes new approaches to humor and nationalism that account for humor's important relation to the history of nationalism, without promoting a nationalist cause.

The second chapter focuses on the late-nineteenth-century humor industry but shifts its analysis to an overdetermined discursive component: the stereotype. Here, by linking the history of the discursive stereotype to the history of the print process and object (stereotyping and the stereotype plate), I complicate poststructural theories of the stereotype, theorize the stereotype's role within the humor industry, and pinpoint the role of material and discursive stereotypes within late-nineteenth-century American mass culture. Drawing on the popular writing of Marietta Holley in particular, and on the history of blackface minstrelsy, I write a cultural materialist history that articulates the political relations between humor and stereotypes in the decade of mass culture's emergence.

Working from these academic histories, discursive theories, and material processes of production, Part Two shifts the focus to the production of humor within a specific institutional setting in the 1890s. Here, I take humor production at *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* as a register for wider changes within the United States. In chapter three, I read *Harper's* and its "Editor's Drawer" humor department in the 1890s – what Frank Luther Mott has called "the most brilliant decade" in the magazine's long history (43) – as in tune with the larger cultural work performed by mass periodicals at the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike my focus in Part One on the processes that transform humor practices into national identities and stereotypes, Part Two investigates the work of producing humorous materials in the American 1890s and how this work was situated within an emerging mass culture under capitalism.

In chapter four, by heuristically stressing the production of humor at Harper's as an "industrial" process motivated by profit and effected by labor, I trace how humor traditions, evening dinner repartee, and even empty print spaces were converted into opportunities for profit. In addition to engaging key theories for print culture studies, this chapter has three focal points: the institution of Harper's; the work of the house's primary humor writer and editor, John Kendrick Bangs; and the relations in print, culture and finance between humor writing and the emerging mass discourse of advertising. Drawing on print culture histories that theorize the role of bibliographical material in the production and reception of text and illustration, and on the personal diary and album of a working ad man and humorist, I tell stories of humor production facilitated by a host of interwoven forms of conversion and think through what it means to coin humor in history.

NOTES

[1] A famous example of this kind of blackface minstrel money joke occurs in the early chapters of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when Jim invests in a "bank" run by a fellow slave. This "specalat'n'," needless to say, costs Jim everything when the bank cannot pay him back his money seven times over in one year, as he expects, but instead simply fails (Twain 43-4).

[2] In *Cultures of Letters*, Richard Brodhead suggests many nineteenth century African American authors (such as Charles Chesnutt) were required to write within the boundaries of particular genres if they desired acceptance in a mostly white "culture of letters." This put pressure on "ethnic" writers to produce humorous writing that relied on racist caricature, replicating stage conventions that often required African American authors to don blackface and perform minstrel stereotypes.

[3] This uncanniness appears once again at the imagined remove of history. Bill Brown notes in "The Tyranny of Things" how important department stores were for the emergence of mass culture:

> Indeed, it is hardly possible to think seriously about material objects in the closing decades of the nineteenth century without beginning to think about the department store, where people were meant to circulate through a newly theatricalized world of goods, where anyone was welcome to merely browse, where the management's idea was not simply to sell merchandise but to inculcate desire. (454)

What the newspaperman found it hardly possible to think – a fantasy for dialect production – takes place in a history it is now hardly possible to not think.

[4] There are many varied and productive definitions of humor that guide my use of the term in this dissertation, but for the most part I invoke "humor" as a simple generic classification. In turn, I follow Nancy Glazener's definition of "genre" as "any 'kind' of writing that is given a name and distinguished from other kinds" (15). The point of refusing to pin down a specific definition of humor beyond the generic is twofold. First, I refuse to identify a universal essence to humor because I am consistently frustrated by attempts to essentialize the term and practice. I believe that humor is produced through context, that is, produced ideologically, and that efforts to ascribe an essential core to humor occlude this process. Suspending essentialist definitions also permits me the widest opportunity to pinpoint the forms of conversion at play in the humor industry and to gauge with precision how humor is coined. Second, the

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generic classification helpfully demands contextualization since definitions of genres are dynamic and subject to cultural forces in history. The generic sense of "humor" also keeps the humor industry itself in view, something a universalized, essentialized definition would obscure. For a good example of the payoff of defining the term as I do, and suspending the definition as I do, see my discussion on pages 104-05 on the sense in which humor writing may not have to be funny to do the work of humor.

[5] Brown works out this critique more fully in *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* and in the essay "How to Do Things with Things (A Toy Story)." In both works he writes that the "secret life of things" might be traced through literary representations of their animation and through imaginative play that taps into "misuse value" and renders a knowable "object" into an unknowable "thing." The problem with commodity culture analyses (and with many new historicist studies) is that they presume a fixed *identity* for things. A new materialism will not ignore the determinations of commodity capitalism but instead pressure capitalism's capacity for making things knowable as objects, pointing to interruptions in that making as moments that are constitutive of knowledge *and* as moments that reveal the vast range of possibilities that were not and may yet be realized for knowledge.

Perhaps the most succinct expression of new materialism comes from the introduction to *The Material Unconscious*, when Brown explicitly relates his theory to New Historicism:

> If what came to be called the New Historicism sought to identify a discourse, logic, or rhetoric in which the literary text participates and on which its intelligibility depends, then what might be called a new materialism will investigate how the literary helps to identify the cultural illogic that exposes history's noninevitability. This does not mean displaying the shards of the past as so many bits and pieces; rather it entails testing the limits of those shards to assume recognizable form. (18)

For new materialism, efforts to ascribe a single meaning for a text "in the 1890s" fail to grasp the extent to which history escapes logic and is the noninevitable result of contests and possibilities. In heuristically "granting dimensionality" to chance, the new materialist engages with a history that escapes totalizing, determinate structures: "the opacity of the chance thing is precisely what makes history legible as something more than a relation between (or a conflation of) what was and what is. The relation between

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the underdertermined and the overdetermined…. allows us to perceive the past, in any one moment, as the struggle between what was and what might have been" (100).

[6] In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Zizek draws a startling homology between the interpretive procedures of Marx's analysis of commodities and those of Freud's analysis of dreams. "In both cases," he explains, "the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form: the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the 'secret' of the form itself*" (11, emphasis original). The discovery of a real object hidden by the commodity fetish, or a real anxiety hidden by the dream work, is for neither theorist the end of analysis but instead the point of departure, since the true end of analysis is to identify and understand the forms of conversion at work, "to explain why the latent dream-thoughts…. were transposed into the form of a dream…. to explain why work assumed the form of the value of a commodity" (11). Zizek's own analysis of ideology is in turn homologous to these forbears (despite, or perhaps because of, his Lacanian habits), since in similar fashion he seeks not so much to reveal the secret contents hidden by ideology as to understand why the work of ideology converts the Real into the forms of the secret and the sublime object.

[7] Nancy Glazener, in *Reading for Realism*, provides a fine overview of how the image of editors as genteel mediators between genuine artists and corrupt marketplaces was manufactured and promoted by elite magazines at the end of the century (1-50).

[8] The knights may also have played into the huge popularity of historical romances. Amy Kaplan writes in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* of the powerful impact this genre had on the period, quoting from "Henry Seidel Canby [who] wrote in 1934, 'Scott and the near Scotts and the school-of-Scotts were such real determinants of inner life for readers brought up in the eighties and nineties that no one will ever understand the America of that day without reading and pondering upon not only *Ivanhoe* but also *To Have and to Hold* and *Richard Carvel* and *Monsieur Beaucaire* and *Under the Red Robe*" (93).

[9] See Raymond Williams' essay on "Magic" in advertising, "Advertising: The Magic System," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980) 185, and Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines* 67-8.

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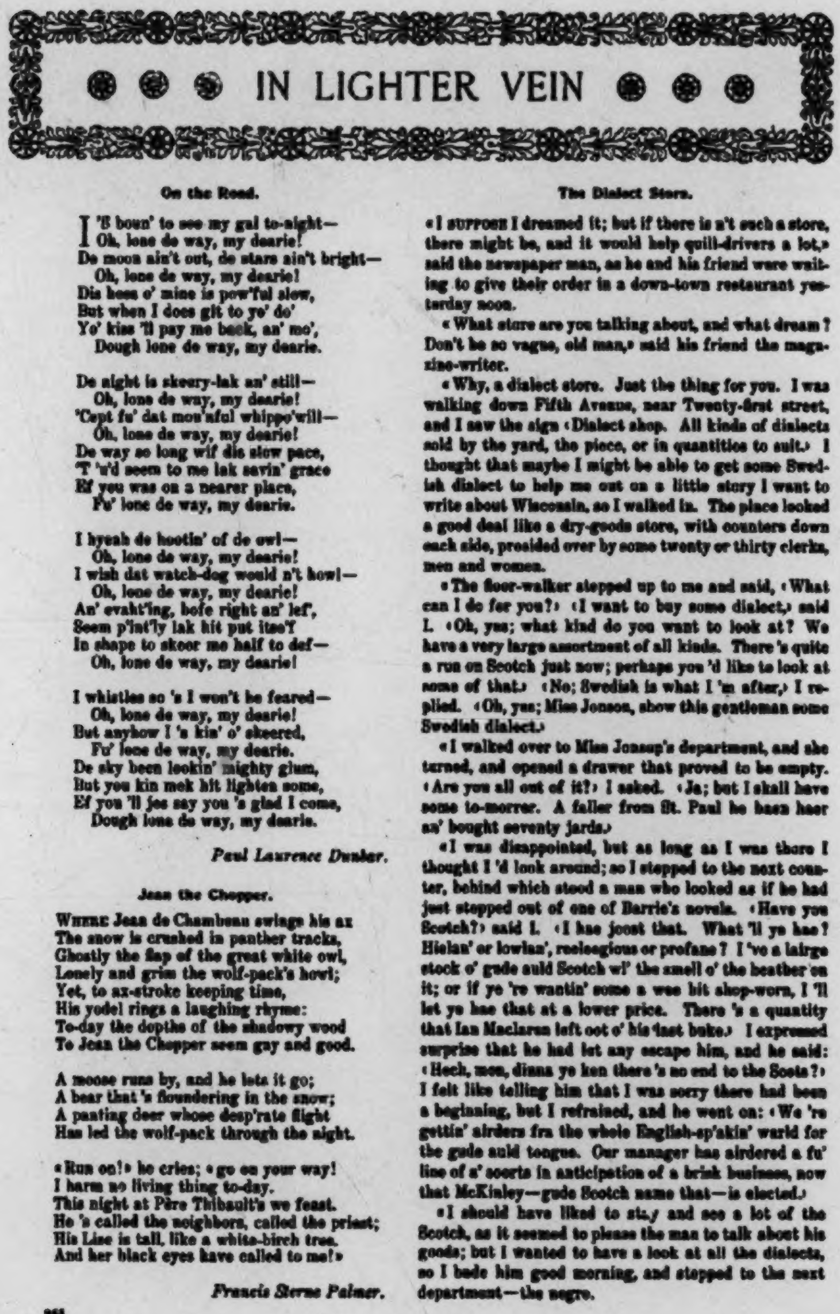
[10] McCracken writes of a similar strategy. In the 1980s, Maybelline advertisers hoped readers would simultaneously a) pleasurably identify with a desirable model, b) worry that they might not look like the model, and c) buy Maybelline to solve the anxiety Maybelline's advertising itself generated. One fruitful path of inquiry regarding humor in advertising might explore humor's involvement in the production of this profitable anxiety.

Introduction – Figure One



IN LIGHTER VEIN

On the Road.

I 'S boun' to see my gal to-night—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
De moon ain't out, de stars ain't bright—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
Dis hoss o' mine is pow'ful slow,
But when I does git to yo' do'
Yo' kiss 'll pay me back, an' mo',
  Dough lone de way, my dearie.

De night is skeery-lak an' still—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
'Cept fu' dat mou'nful whippo'will—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
De way so long wif dis slow pace,
'T 'u'd seem to me lak savin' grace
Ef you was on a nearer place,
  Fu' lone de way, my dearie.

I hyeah de hootin' of de owl—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
I wish dat watch-dog would n't howl—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
An' evaht'ing, bofe right an' lef',
Seem p'int'ly lak hit put itse'f
In shape to skeer me half to def—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!

I whistles so 's I won't be feared—
  Oh, lone de way, my dearie!
But anyhow I 's kin' o' skeered,
  Fu' lone de way, my dearie.
De sky been lookin' mighty glum,
But you kin mek hit lighten some,
Ef you 'll jes say you 's glad I come,
  Dough lone de way, my dearie.

Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Jean the Chopper.

WHERE Jean de Chambeau swings his ax
The snow is crushed in panther tracks,
Ghostly the flap of the great white owl,
Lonely and grim the wolf-pack's howl;
Yet, to ax-stroke keeping time,
His yodel rings a laughing rhyme:
To-day the depths of the shadowy wood
To Jean the Chopper seem gay and good.

A moose runs by, and he lets it go;
A bear that 's floundering in the snow;
A panting deer whose desp'rate flight
Has led the wolf-pack through the night.

«Run on!» he cries; «go on your way!
I harm no living thing to-day.
This night at Père Thibault's we feast.
He 's called the neighbors, called the priest;
His Lise is tall, like a white-birch tree,
And her black eyes have called to me!»

Francis Sterne Palmer.

958

The Dialect Store.

«I SUPPOSE I dreamed it; but if there is n't such a store, there might be, and it would help quill-drivers a lot,» said the newspaper man, as he and his friend were waiting to give their order in a down-town restaurant yesterday noon.

«What store are you talking about, and what dream? Don't be so vague, old man,» said his friend the magazine-writer.

«Why, a dialect store. Just the thing for you. I was walking down Fifth Avenue, near Twenty-first street, and I saw the sign ‹Dialect shop. All kinds of dialects sold by the yard, the piece, or in quantities to suit.› I thought that maybe I might be able to get some Swedish dialect to help me out on a little story I want to write about Wisconsin, so I walked in. The place looked a good deal like a dry-goods store, with counters down each side, presided over by some twenty or thirty clerks, men and women.

«The floor-walker stepped up to me and said, ‹What can I do for you?› ‹I want to buy some dialect,› said I. ‹Oh, yes; what kind do you want to look at? We have a very large assortment of all kinds. There 's quite a run on Scotch just now; perhaps you 'd like to look at some of that.› ‹No; Swedish is what I 'm after,› I replied. ‹Oh, yes; Miss Jonson, show this gentleman some Swedish dialect.›

«I walked over to Miss Jonson's department, and she turned, and opened a drawer that proved to be empty. ‹Are you all out of it?› I asked. ‹Ja; but I shall have some to-morrer. A faller from St. Paul he bean heer an' bought seventy jards.›

«I was disappointed, but as long as I was there I thought I 'd look around; so I stepped to the next counter, behind which stood a man who looked as if he had just stepped out of one of Barrie's novels. ‹Have you Scotch?› said I. ‹I hae joost that. What 'll ye hae? Hielan' or lowlan', releegious or profane? I 've a lairge stock o' gude auld Scotch wi' the smell o' the heather on it; or if ye 're wantin' some a wee bit shop-worn, I 'll let ye hae that at a lower price. There 's a quantity that Ian Maclaren left oot o' his ‹last buke.› I expressed surprise that he had let any escape him, and he said: ‹Hech, mon, dinna ye ken there 's no end to the Scots?› I felt like telling him that I was sorry there had been a beginning, but I refrained, and he went on: ‹We 're gettin' airders fra the whole English-sp'akin' warld for the gude auld tongue. Our manager has airdered a fu' line of a' soorts in anticipation of a brisk business, now that McKinley—gude Scotch name that—is elected.›

«I should have liked to stay and see a lot of the Scotch, as it seemed to please the man to talk about his goods; but I wanted to have a look at all the dialects, so I bade him good morning, and stepped to the next department—the negro.

Introduction – Figure Two

«Here an unctuous voice called out: ‹Fo' de Lawd! Ah don' b'leeve you 'll pass me widout buyin'. Got 'em all hyah, boss—Sou' Ca'lina an' Ten'see an' Virginny. Tawmas Nelson Page buys a heap er stuff right yer. Dat man sut'n'y got a great haid. He was de fustes' one ter see how much folks was dyin' ter git a leetle di'lect er de ra'ht sawt, an' Ah reckon Ah sol' him de fus' yard he evah bo't.›

«‹Do you sell it by the yard?› I asked, just to bring him out. ‹Shoo!› and pulling down a roll of black goods, he unrolled enough dialect to color ‹Uncle Tom's Cabin.› But I said, ‹I don't want to buy, uncle; but I 'm obliged to you for showing it to me.› ‹Oh, dat 's all right, boss. No trouble to show goods. Ah reckon yo' nev' saw sech a heap er local col'in' as dat. Hyah! hyah! hyah! We got de goods, an' any tahm you want to fix up a tale, an' put in de Queen's English in black, come yer an' as' for me. Good day, sah.› And I passed on to the next—Western dialect.

«Here I found that James Whitcomb Riley had just engaged the whole output of the plant. The clerk had an assistant in his little son,—a Hoosier boy,—and he piped up: ‹We got 'ist a littul bit er child's di'lec', an' my popper says 'at ef Mist' Riley don't come an' git it soon 'at I can sell it all my own se'f. 'At 'd be the mostest fun!› and his childish treble caused all the other clerks in the store to look around and smile kindly at him.

«In the German department the clerk told me he was not taking orders for dialect in bulk. ‹Zome off dose tayatreekalers dey buy it, aber I sell not de best to dem. I sell imitation kinds «made in Chairmany.» Aber I haf der best oof you vant it.›

«I told him I did not care to buy, and passed on to the French-Canadian department. The clerk was just going out to lunch; but although I told him I merely wished to look, and not to buy, he said politely: ‹I try hall I can for got di'lect, but hup in Mon'réal dat McLennan he use hall dere is; but bymby I speak for some dat a frien' have, an' 'e sen' me some. An' 'e tell me I 'll get hit las' summer.› I expressed a polite wish that he might get his goods even sooner than ‹las' summer,› and walked to the Jew-dialect counter, over which I was nearly pulled by the Hebrew clerk. ‹You 're chust in time,› he said. ‹Say, veepin' Rachel! but I sell you a pargain. Dese goots on'y been out von veek on der staich; unt so hellup me cracious! you look so like mein prudder Inre dat I let dem go›—here he lowered his voice to a whisper—‹I let dem go for a quarter of a dollar.›

«I resisted him, and hurried to the Yankee department. There was tall hustling going on there, and a perfect mob of buyers of all sorts and conditions of writers; and it took half a dozen men, women, and children, including three typical farmers, to wait on them; and they were selling it by the inch and by the car-load. ‹Wall, I 'm plumb tired. Wisht they 'd let up so 't I could git a snack er sump'n' inside me,› said one; and he looked so worn out that I passed on to the Irish counter. A twinkling-eyed young Irishman, not long over, in answer to my question said: ‹Sure, there 's not much call for large quantities av ut. Jane Barlow do be havin' a good dale, an' the funny papers do be usin' ut in smart lots, but 't is an aisy toime I have, an' that 's a good thing, for toimes is harrd.›

«I paused a moment at the English-dialect counter, and the rosy-cheeked clerk said: ‹Cawn't I show you the very litest thing in Coster?› I told him no, and he offered me Lancashire and Yorkshire at ‹gritely reduced rites›; but I was proof against his pleading, and having now visited all the departments but one, went to that.»

«What was it?» asked the writer for the magazines.

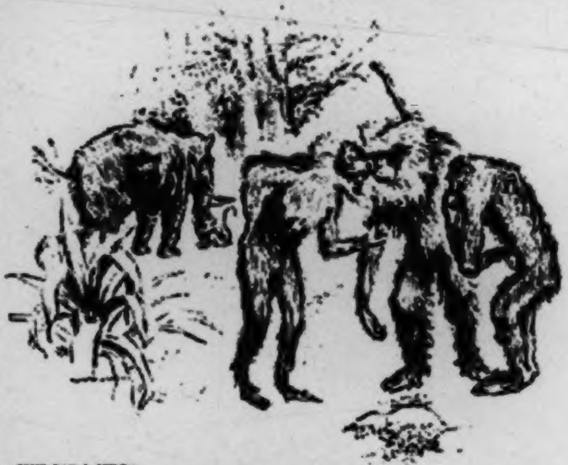
«The tough-dialect counter.»

«Tough is not a dialect,» said he.

«Maybe not, but it sounds all right, all right. Well, whatever it is, the fellow in charge was a regular Ninth-Warder, and when I got abreast of him he hailed me with, ‹Say, cully, wot sort d' yer want? I got a dim-dandy Sunny-school line er samples fer use in dese joints, or I k'n gi' yer hot stuff up ter de limit an' beyon'. See? Here 's a lot of damaged «wot t'ells» dat I 'll trun down fer a fiver, an' no questions ast. Say, burn me fer a dead farmer if I ever sol' dem at dat figger before; but dey 's some dat Townsen' did n' use, an' yet dey 's dead-sure winners wit' de right gang. See?›

«And then I woke up, if I was asleep; and if I was n't, I wish I could find the store again, for I 'd be the greatest dialect-writer of the age if I could get goods on credit there. Say, waiter, we came for lunch, not supper.»

Charles Battell Loomis.



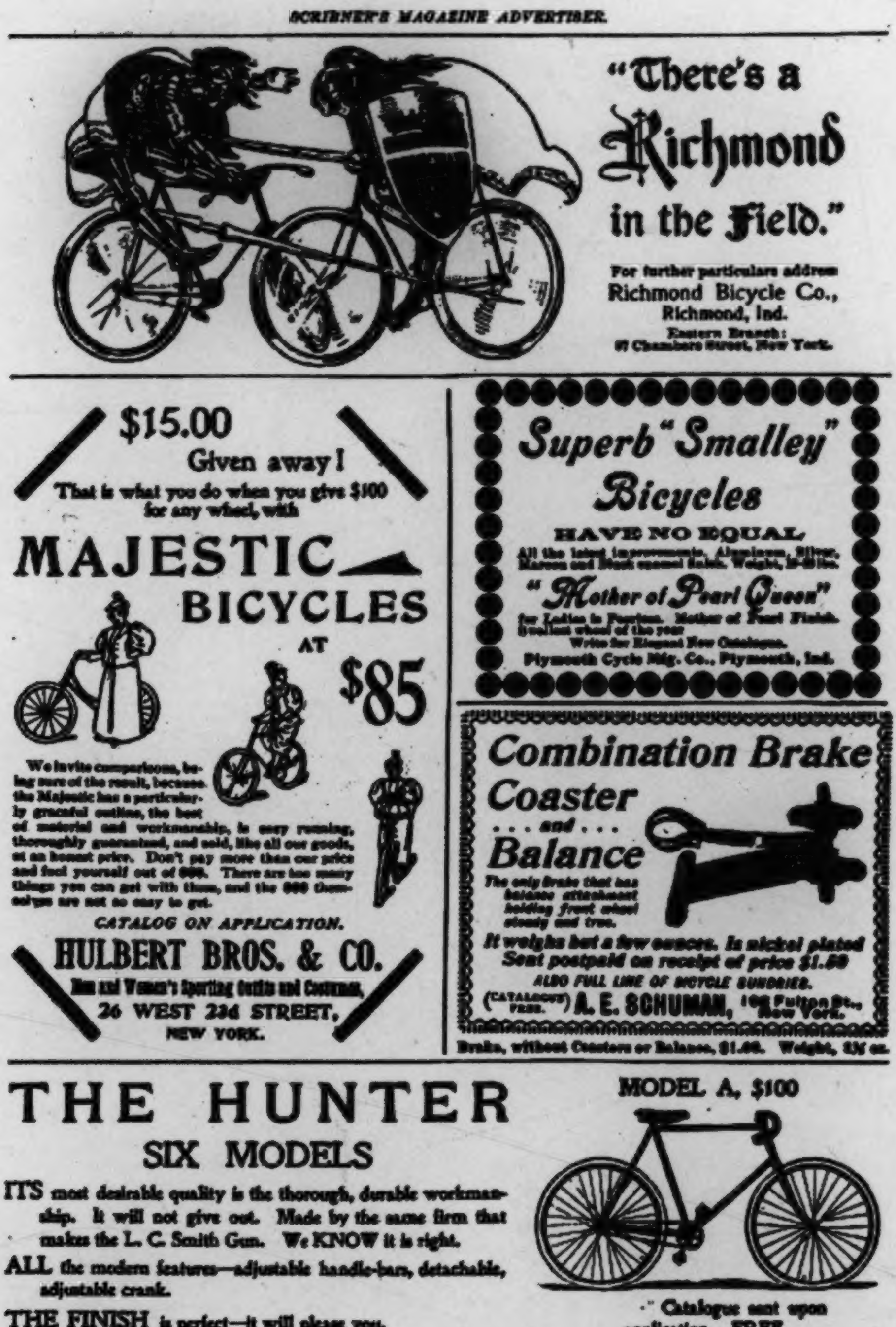
[illegible]

A SEIZURE IN THE JUNGLE.

«I say, Uncle Boon, what 's the row?»

UNCLE BOON: «Why, the elephant owes my sister for cocoanut milk, and Bab is going to hold his trunk until he pays.»

Introduction – Figure Three



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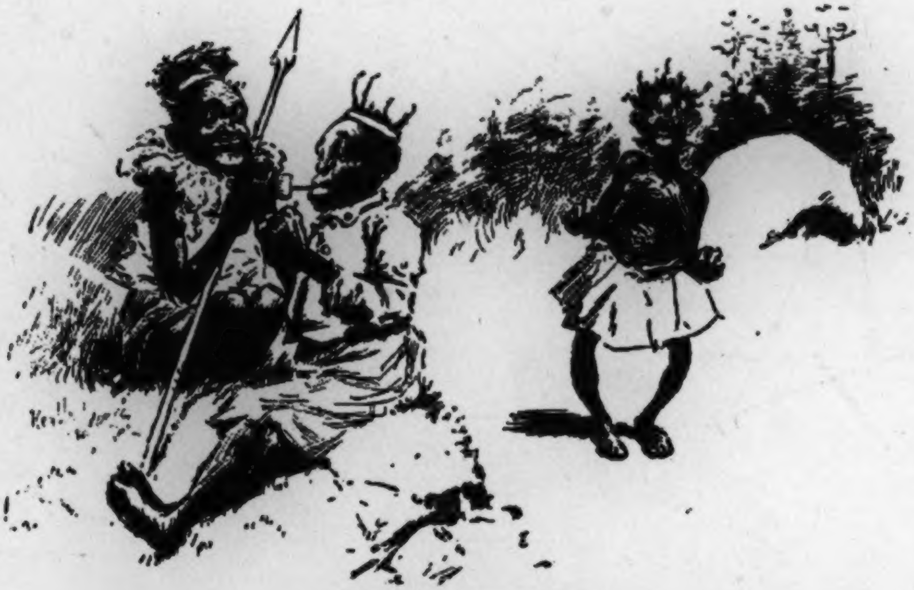
Introduction – Figure Four



HUMOR IN THE BUSH.

FIRST GUARDSMAN: "I don't think the selection of Gumbo for treasurer was a good one."
SECOND GUARDSMAN: "Why not?"
FIRST GUARDSMAN: "Well, from what I see of the man I think he is crooked at bottom."

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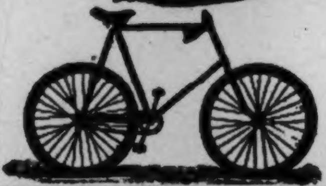

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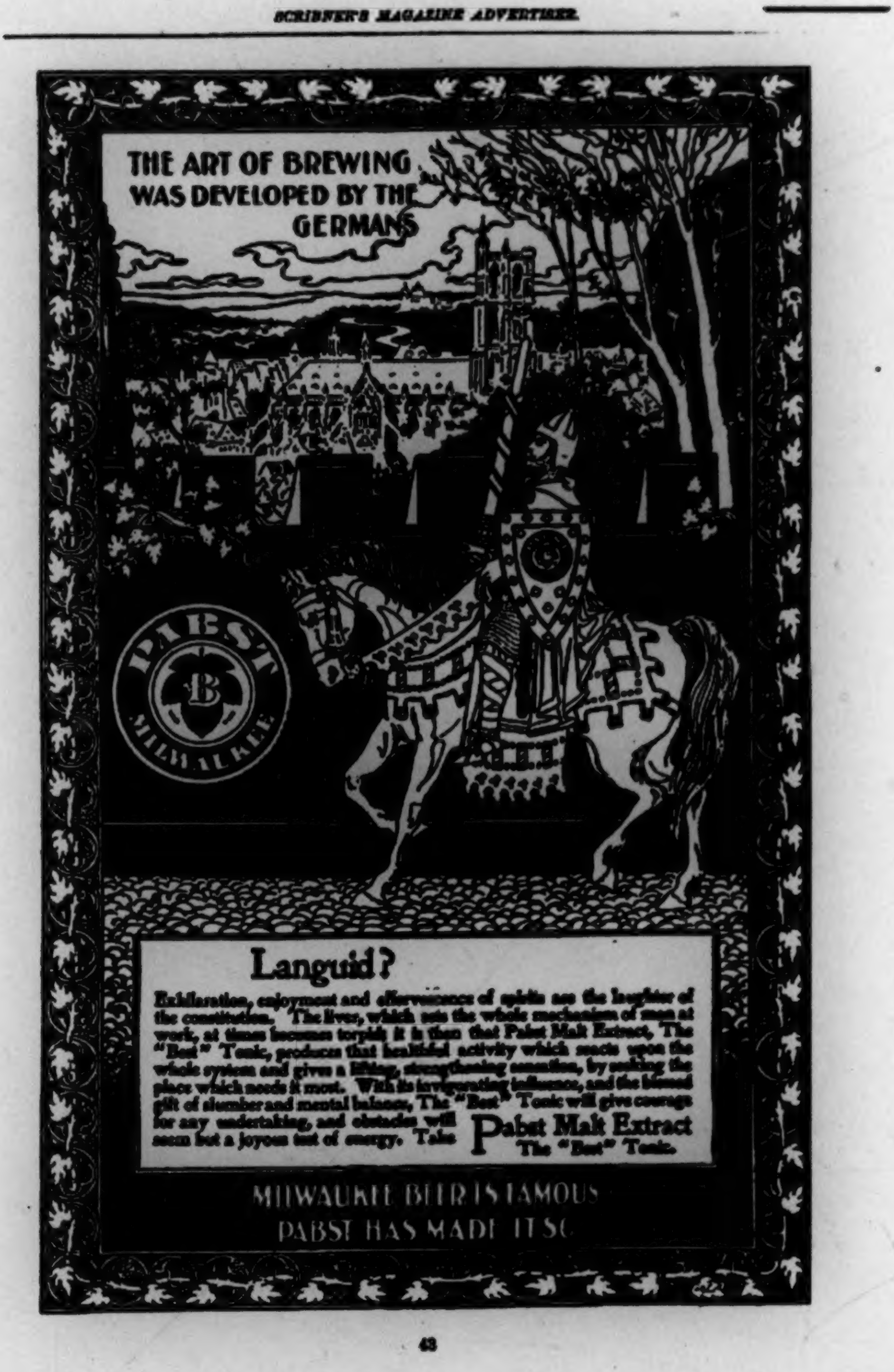

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Introduction – Figure Six

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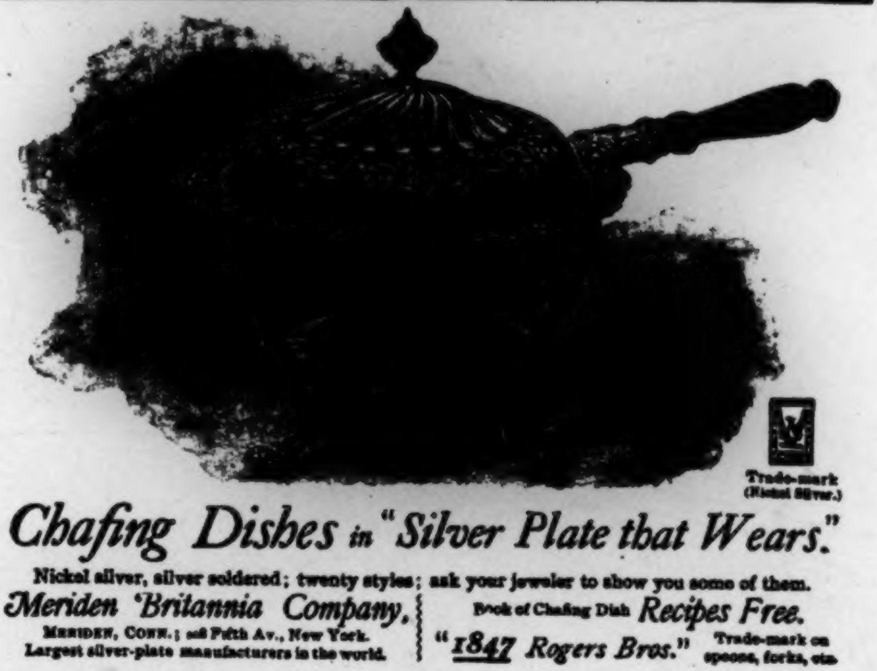

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Nickel silver, silver soldered; twenty styles; ask your jeweler to show you some of them.

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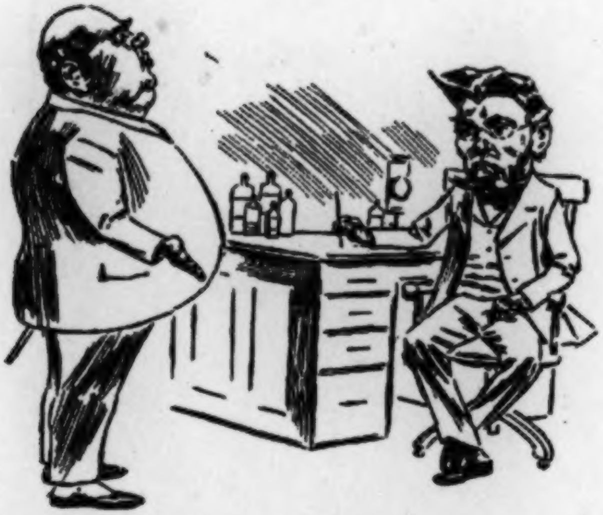
Introduction – Figure Seven



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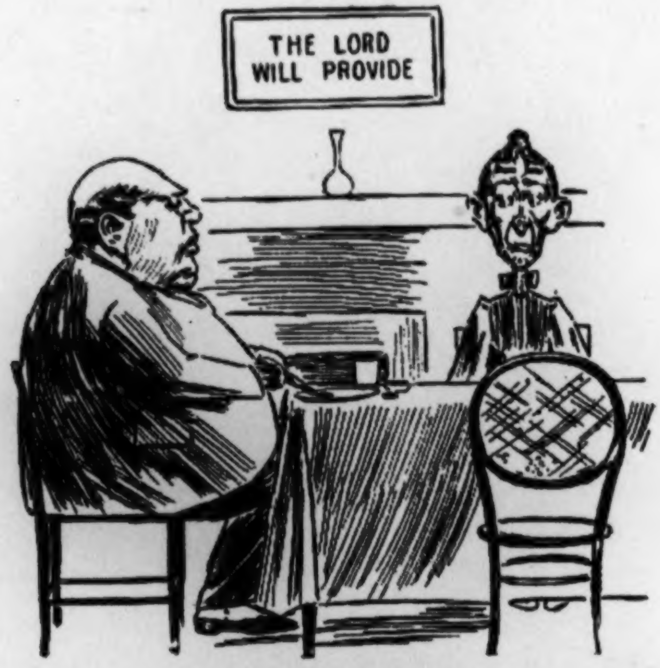

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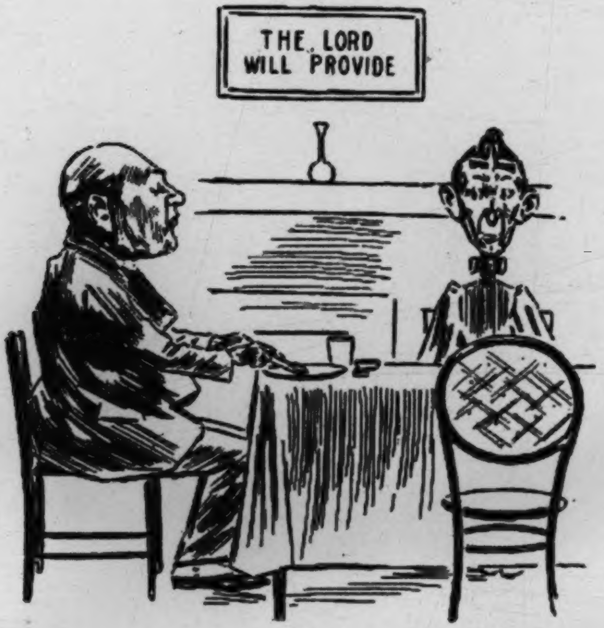
Introduction – Figure Nine



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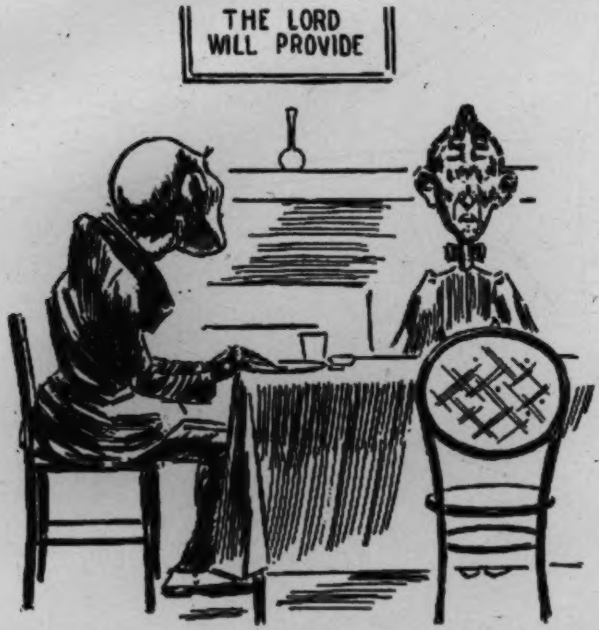

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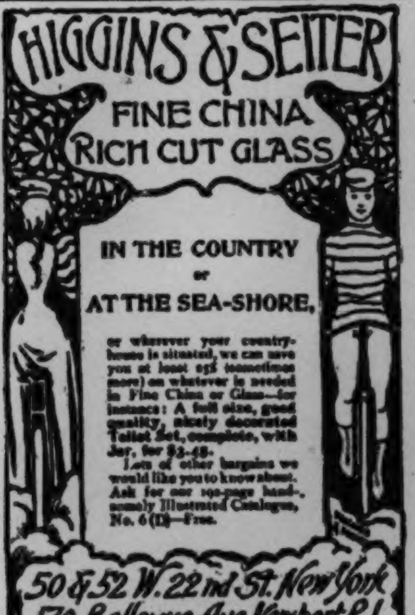

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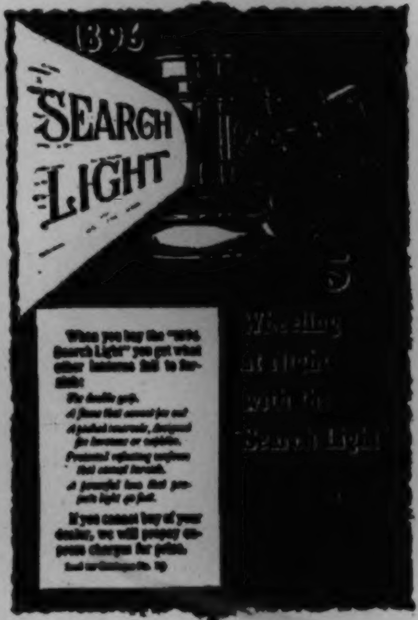

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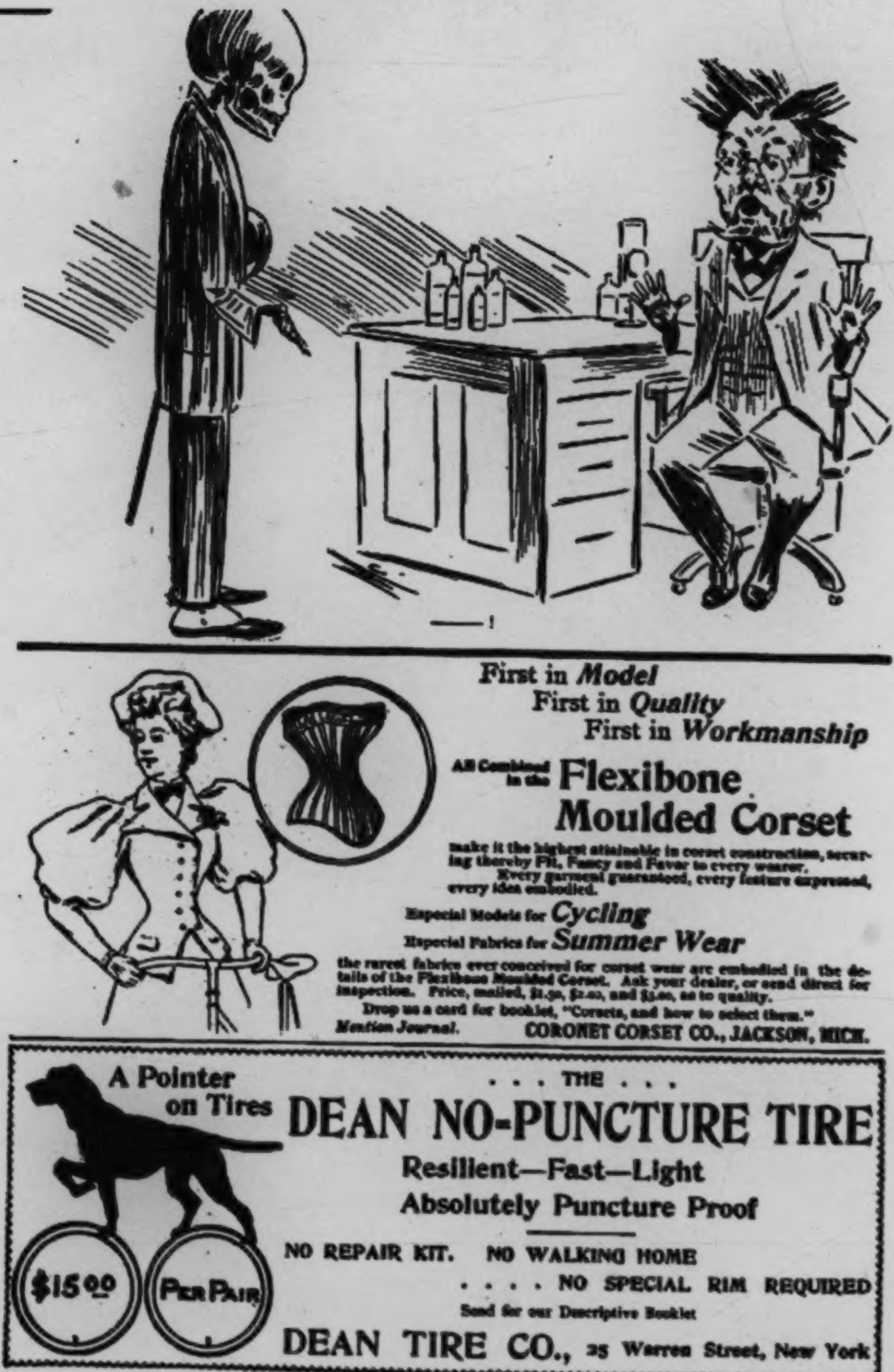

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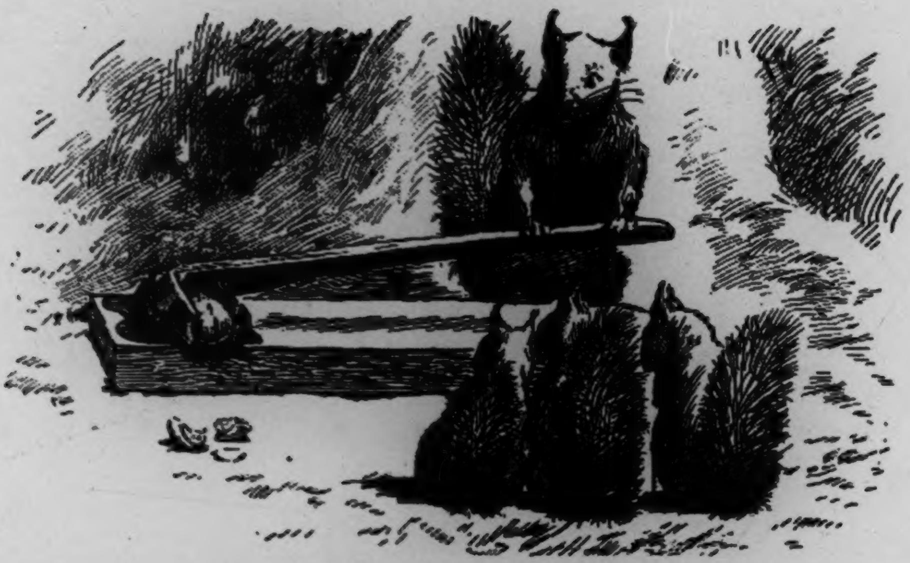

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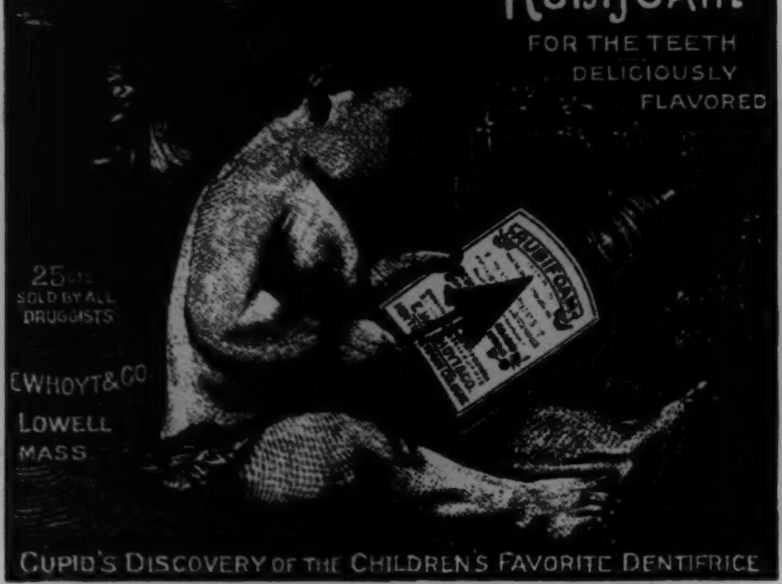
and don't worry the baby; avoid both unpleasant conditions by giving the child pure, digestible food. Don't use solid preparations. *Infant Health* is a valuable pamphlet for mothers. Send your address to the New York Condensed Milk Company, New York.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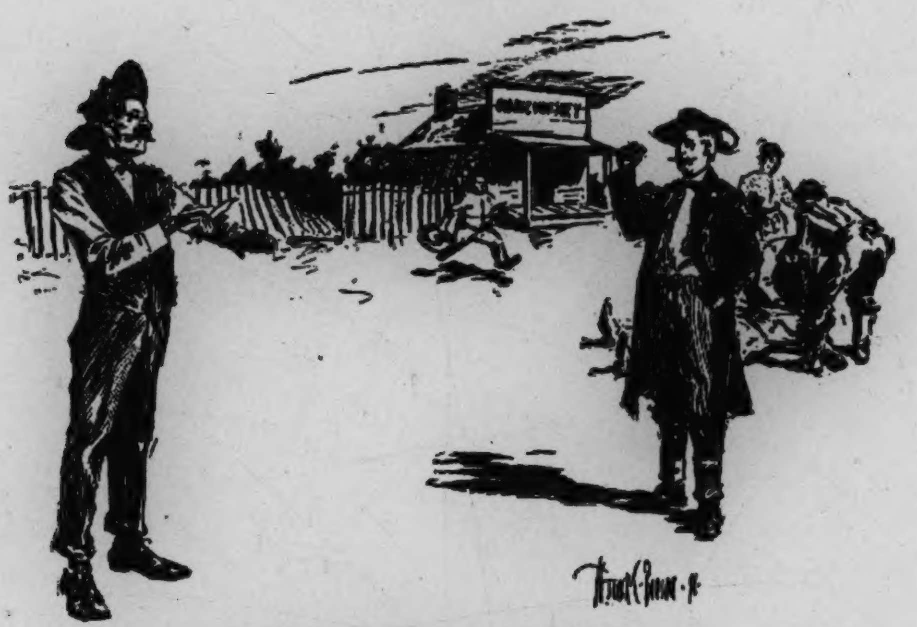
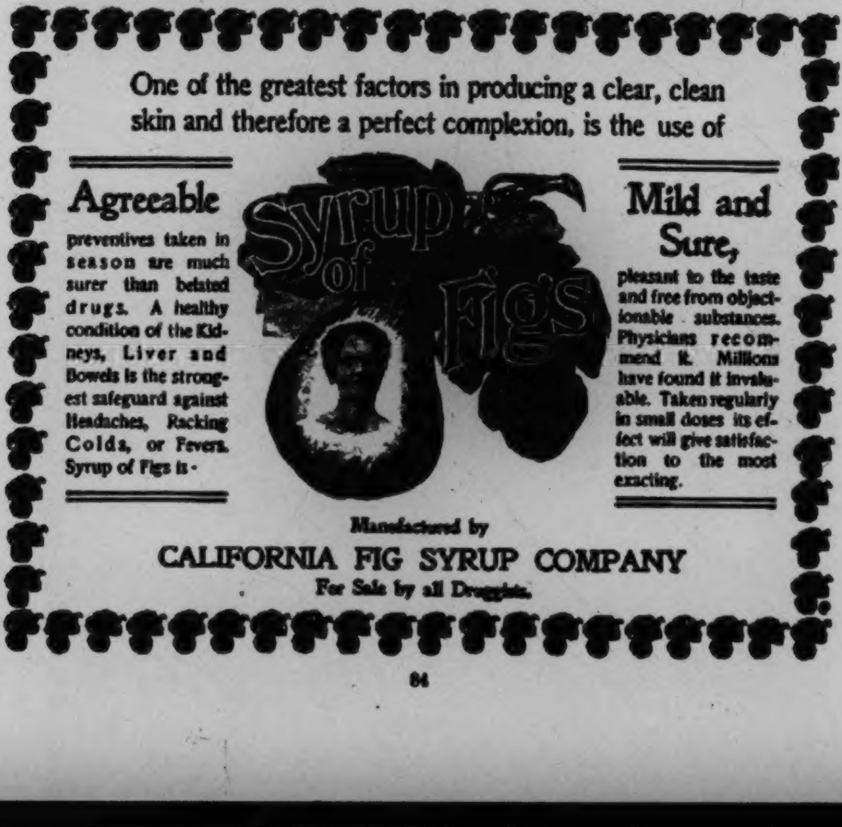


SOCIAL AMENITIES IN KENTUCKY.

"What is the excitement?" inquired Colonel Bludd.
"No excitement at all, suh," replied the Major. "I have just been cutting an acquaintance."



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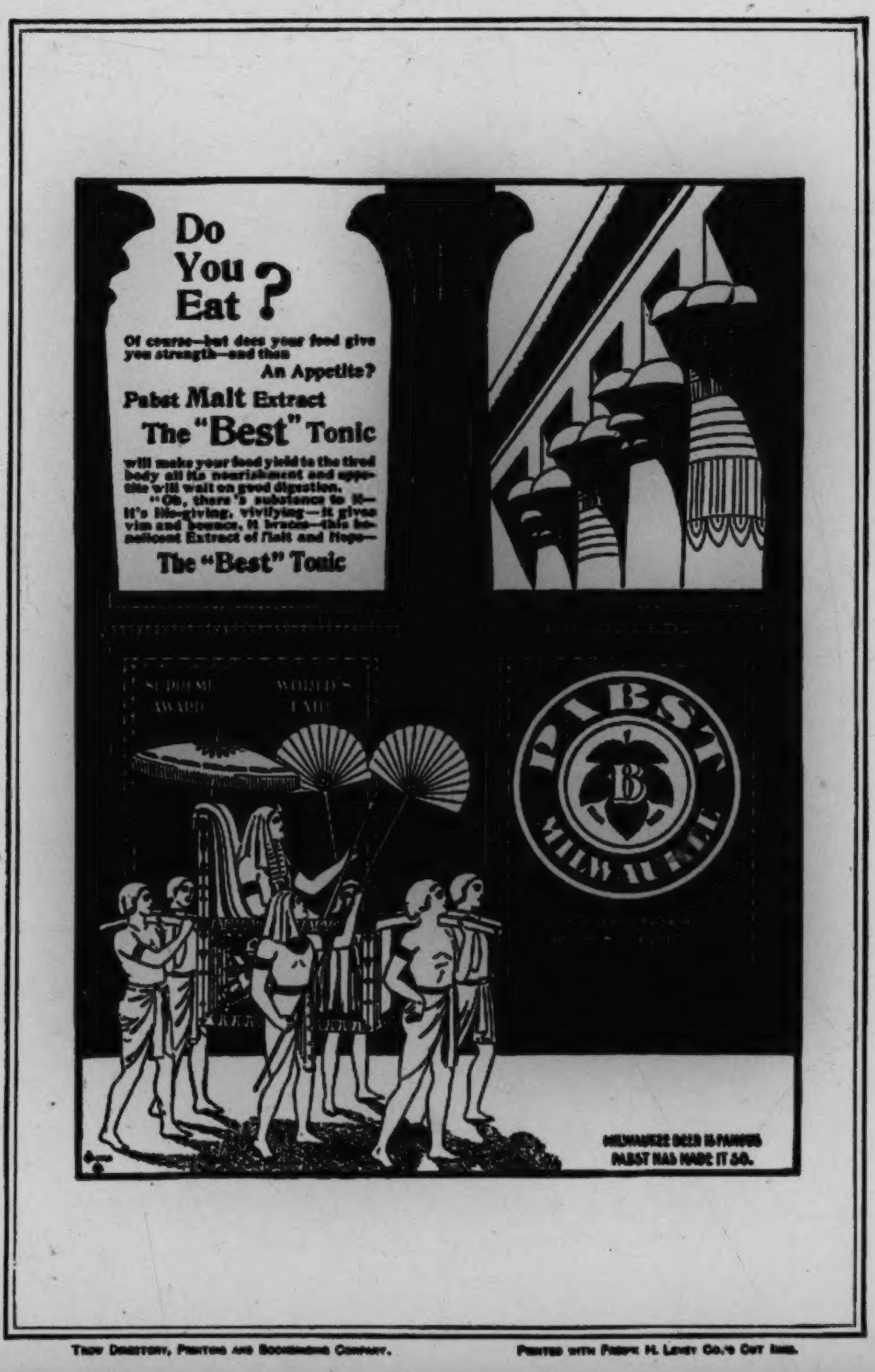

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Part One

American Articulations

The history of every American's life is humorous.

-S.S. Cox

Chapter One: Making Humor American

> The past remains present and active in the dispositions it has produced.
>
> – Pierre Bourdieu

> All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes.
>
> – Toni Morrison

The irths of a Nation

In 2000, HarperCollins published the first in a biennial series of humor anthologies produced by the Thurber House, a small institution in Ohio dedicated to preserving the memory of humorist James Thurber and cultivating a prosperous future for American humor. Titled *Mirth of a Nation*, and self-dubbed "America's Most Trusted Humor Anthology," the book is intended to preserve humor otherwise lost because of its ephemeral publication in magazines and newspapers. *Mirth of a Nation* does not mention its more scholarly forerunner, the 1983 humor anthology *The Mirth of a Nation: America's Great Dialect Humor*. Edited by former American Humor Studies Association president Walter Blair and his colleague Raven I. McDavid, Jr., the anthology strives to preserve and promote lost nineteenth-century dialect writing, or what it calls "Outstanding – But Unread – American Humor."[1] Neither *Mirth* mentions its titular ancestor, the 1953 humor anthology *The Mirth of a Nation*. Edited by vaudevillian

Jimmy Lyons, this *Mirth* endeavors to preserve the memory of American vaudeville humor, repeating often the gentle query and prescription, "Remember Vaudeville." All three anthologies share not just a *name* but also a *purpose* insofar as they are explicitly dedicated to ensuring American humor's place in the national memory, a place imagined as under threat from the ephemerality of cheap mass publication, changing literary standards, and forgetful senses of humor.[2]

Of these three *Mirths*, only one, the Thurber House production, cites the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* from which the punning title derives. The famous full-length feature film, like a kind of celluloid anthology, preserves and promotes a propagandic history of the Ku Klux Klan, asking viewers, in effect, to "remember whiteness" by linking racial conflict and the civil war to the genesis of the United States as a coherent nation.[3] Significantly, the Thurber House citation takes the form of an anxious denial, explaining that "we have no motive to play off the title of D.W. Griffith's film" (1). But if this *Mirth*, and its counterparts, lack any motive for "playing off" Griffith's film, their titular correspondence becomes truly puzzling. Does this correspondence suggest an important point of ideological intersection between efforts to preserve American humor and white supremacy – an intersection marked by their collective disavowal of any point of connection between the irths? Whose interests are served by the simultaneous assertion and denial of any meaningful connection between them?

The correspondences among the books and film are striking. All four irths imagine histories of the nation as under threat of being lost from memory. All four preserve lost narratives that link the nation, through "history," to a set of distinct characteristics held commonly by "Americans." All four draw on a rhetoric of national genesis (captured by Griffith's title) to gird up their narratives of national progress. All three *Mirths* assume a link between humor practice and the nation, and this link – which converts humor industry genres into instances of national identification – is effected through the form of a pun that cites a white supremacist version of U.S. history. The dialect and vaudeville *Mirths* are both dedicated to preserving humor industry genres contemporary with *Birth's* release year and its historical setting, marking the ties that bind their efforts on behalf of American humor to the efforts on behalf of whiteness in Griffith's film. Motives may remain inchoate, but certainly such correspondences are not merely the product of accident. And even if they are, certainly this accident is an invitation to explore the history of American humor in relation to a racist nationalist exceptionalism; as Bill Brown might put it, this accident deserves to be stretched to the limits of intelligibility. What really makes humor practices constitutive of a unique and exceptional national identity and character? Why is this connection so compelling that it has at least thrice been invoked to articulate a link between the nation and humor through citations of *Birth of a Nation*? Why are anthologies that preserve "distinct" American humor practices consistently articulated to a nationalist project, and why is this project itself articulated to Griffith's celebration of American white supremacy?[4]

These questions, and the correspondences and accidents they index, provide a framework for historicizing and theorizing the surprising connections between American humor and the nation. I want to draw on these correspondences to tell a history of the academic articulation of humor practice to an essentialized national identity. Stretching the accident of the irths to its limits of intelligibility, I will be less concerned with the experience of humor affect in history, though it is a reasonable enough means for engaging humor, than with how *representations of* the experience of humor affect are imagined as the source of an inevitable link between humor and national identity. Moving from popular magazine articles of the late nineteenth century to the U.S. academic study of humor in the twentieth century, the first section of this chapter will trace the invention of an academic tradition that believes "American humor" to be an expression of "American character," and tell in broad strokes the history of how this particular form of scholarship made humor American. Such inquiry will help theorize one possible explanation for the accident of the irths and the close relations that obtain between the study and preservation of American humor and white supremacy.

Because my account of American Humor Studies will be explicitly critical, calling into question the durable belief that American humor practice is an expression of a unique national character, I do not pretend to exhaust the possibilities for capturing the full range of contests, achievements and agreements that characterize this literary field of inquiry to the present day. Indeed, the field's anecdotal accounts of personality (figures such as Constance Rourke, Hamlin Hill and Walter Blair have gleaned numerous testimonials to their admirable personal and professional characters) is one rich path of historical inquiry I do not explore, and in focusing on the production of humor-as-American I neglect other key, productive aspects of the field. What I will write is a history of this field that recounts its profound commitment, until at least the end of the twentieth century, to a nationalist academic program. At times the history I tell will seem only another attack on the field's already downtrodden champions. But the link between national identity and humor practice so deeply imbedded in the field constitutes one of its most cherished accomplishments and one of its most problematic assumptions – one that lives on even in popular anthologies like the 2000 *Mirth*. The story I tell below begins to unravel the articulation of American humor practice, and its study, to the ideology of white supremacy, an articulation registered in striking fashion in the accident of the irths.

The final section of this chapter takes up my own challenge to rethink the relations between "American humor" and nationality. There is a danger, after all, that my historicization of the articulation of U.S. humor practice to a nationalist exceptionalism – a historicization that asserts this articulation is not inevitable but made and imagined – will leave undertheorized other possible relations between humor practice and the nation. In other words, once I have demonstrated the troubling history of the traditional AHS approach to humor and the nation, what do I intend to do with a set of relations between humor and the nation that still obtain? What I intend to do is bring into the horizon humor production within a historically specific industry and explore how that industry related to the nation (understood as what Benedict Anderson calls an "imagined community") and to nationalism. If for AHS American humor practice is an expression of the national character, then for me the U.S. humor industry is motivated, to a significant extent, by profit, and thus relates at least in this instance to the "nation" as a product for sale by that industry and as an imagined audience. Furthermore, in terms of politics, the traditional AHS approach to American humor leaves room only for questions that address any humor practice's relations to the exceptional nation: for this traditional approach, a humor practice is either distinctly American, or it isn't. And in either case, according to the politics of this approach, the concept of the identity of the "American" remains unquestioned, fixed forever to a white supremacist identity captured by the supposedly motiveless accident of the irths. Politically, my approach to the U.S. humor industry leaves room for U.S. humor practices to express what Frederic Jameson calls a "political unconscious" – that is, such practices shore up hegemonic notions of the American nation that secure predictable profit, and at the same time propose or express, if only unconsciously, alternative modes of understanding humor practice that oppose the dominant ideology. At the end of this chapter, then, I will briefly explore this approach to humor-and-the-nation in the works of popular 1890s humorists David Ker, Bill Nye, and Marietta Holley. Concluding with a description of an effort in the 1990s by UNESCO to articulate humor practice to international cooperation, I will convey the value of my approach for American Studies by contrasting it to traditional AHS methodologies. It is not my intention to evacuate humor studies of its nationalist history, but instead to explore that history and its consequences while imagining alternative histories and futures for the study and practice of humor, alternatives that were as present and unfinished in the 1890s as they are today.[5]

Yankee Bull Crapaud

Discourses linking humor practice to identity can be traced at least as far back as the origin of the word "humor" in the ontological categorization of bodily "humors" that produce temperament and character, while discourses linking temperament and national identity are at least as old as the idea of the nation. My academic history necessarily begins, then, *in medias res*, when popular definitions of the national character became points of departure for the scholarly study of humor in the United States. It seems particularly appropriate, given the debt notions of "the national character" owe to popular discourses, that I begin with widely circulated magazine articles from the late nineteenth century that took this link as an inspiration for narrating national history. For these articles, humor practices express and constitute a unique, universal national character, and thus form a key component of a singular, exceptional American identity.

I have also chosen this magazine discourse for my beginning because, as David Shumway has noted, late-nineteenth-century magazines were the direct institutional precursors to the twentieth century study of literature and culture in universities. Before literature and folk practice were considered proper academic material, popular magazines led the way in criticizing and analyzing these cultural forms. As I will demonstrate, the questions magazines brought to humor practice, and the methodologies they promoted for answering these questions, remained central to AHS at least until the mid 1980s and, in the case of some influential AHS scholars, at least until 1998. Working out this curious history for the study of what came to be identified as "American humor" has the virtue of linking the emergence of American Humor Studies to the emergence of academic literary study in the United States even as it stresses the unique history of an academic subfield that has remained until recently uncannily similar to its late-nineteenth-century magazine counterpart.[6]

I have, then, selected three articles from the closing decades of the nineteenth century for their heavy influence on the future of the field and for their common appearance in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, a key player in nineteenth-century U.S. literature and criticism. Indeed, the magazine's pivotal role in the production of a link between humor practice and the American nation is registered in the consistent reference to these articles throughout twentieth-century American humor scholarship. All academic study of U.S. literature can trace its history to nineteenth-century magazines; all academic study of American humor can trace its history to *Harper's.*

American humor scholars often cite S.S. Cox's April 1875 article "American Humor" (a section of a separately published book) as a "reflection" of humor's important place in U.S. culture during this period (see figure one). Indeed, the article does attest to humor as a seemingly natural part of the mass print landscape. "American Humor," however, also discloses in its own peculiar fashion how humor as a print discourse was understood *in relation to* other discourses, including nationalism, that were common to nineteenth-century U.S. mass print and culture. In so doing, the article provides a neat lesson in the means by which humor practices became articulated to the national character and how magazines and scholarship helped make humor American.

Reading or practicing humor, Cox maintains throughout his article, always simultaneously registers difference and similarity, especially in the case of national and racial identity. He writes: "humor differs only in degree, not in kind. The white man and black man both have fun in them, just as the diamond and charcoal are of the same material – carbon. In one it is crystallized and concentrated; in the other it is diffusive and combustible. Try each under the blow-pipe: the charcoal will glow with plentiful scintillations long before the diamond releases a sparkle of light" (691). To bolster his effort to maintain similarity only to emphasize difference between white and black, Cox accompanies this passage with an illustration of a chubby black man in overalls gently guffawing; the caption reads, referring to the mass culture humor industry of minstrelsy, "Jolly Darky" (see figure 2). Just as the image and text fantasize a basic material connection between races only to highlight a basic material and commercial distance between races, so too do text and image link the imagined materials of race to the imagined practices of humor. Furthermore, in selecting materials (coal and diamonds) almost overinvested with commercial value, Cox points to a perceived relation between white and black paralleled by a difference between luxury and labor, between coarse and fine/refined, between surplus and use value. The contradiction – that black and white's common material origin sustains ontological distinctions of value that divide black and white – allows Cox simultaneously a sweet rhetorical conceit of equality and a violent symbolic conceit of difference.

Having introduced humor's racialized history, Cox moves on to link a common nationalistic discourse to humor practice:

> An Englishman laughs at the untoward effort of a Frenchman to speak English, though a Frenchman would not laugh at John Bull's awkwardness at French; yet Johnny Crapaud never laughs more than at Bull's surly airs of assumed consequence. An African bursts into irrepressible glee at the faintest approach of the ludicrous, as if his mind had but one side, and it was all smitten and quivering with jollity; yet the grave Spaniard, his master, composedly smokes his cigarette and twirls his moustache, utterly impervious to the stroke. The one, like jelly, shakes with every motion around; the other is frigid, like ice, and thaws with a cold trickle of pleasure. (692) (see figure 3)

This passage, accompanied by an illustration of "John Bull and Johnny Crapaud," maintains that nationality becomes visible (and audible) through, just as it is importantly constituted by, identifiable and classifiable humor practices. The distinction drawn between John Bull, Johnny Crapaud, the anonymous African, and the masterful Spaniard of continental habits (whose mastery follows closely on the African's irrepressibility), much like the "Jolly Darky" passage, maintains an implicit hierarchy among humor practices that readers are required to decipher to fully grasp Cox's supposed celebration of the human variety.[7] That is to say, Cox's celebration of human variety is also an effort to hierarchize cultural practice and to make the frightening assertion that all cultural practices are potentially classifiable. Ellen McCracken's history of advertising in the 1980s notes that modern magazine advertisements commonly promise products as relief for anxieties and desires actually produced by the ads themselves (see 37 n10); here, Cox employs a similar technique, encouraging anxieties and desires (am I practicing humor properly? how will people read my class status, race, and nationality from my humor practice?) that only his article and *Harper's* can satisfy.

These anxieties are fostered by Cox's effort to explicitly address or interpellate *Harper's* readers and their humor practices when he refers to an illustration with the caption "Two Readers of 'Harper'" (see figure 3). The two readers appear to be riding a train or streetcar, seated one behind the other. The front seat is occupied by an older man in a tall black hat, spectacles, and gloves, reading a folded magazine. He is gazing, with arched eyebrows and frown, upon the man in the seat behind him. This second man, who takes up a significantly larger portion of the illustration, is dressed in a fur lined coat and short hat, is slumped in his seat (his feet are level with the seat and his knees are resting against the seatback in front of him), and is sporting a broad, toothy grin, while also reading a folded magazine. Cox writes:

> Observe these two men on the cars. They buy *Harper's Magazine*. The one begins with the Scientific article, the other begins at the "Drawer end," and reads, like a Hebrew, backward.
>
> There is no law for humor. Like the comet or the cholera, it comes – God only knows whence – and its very orbit is an eccentricity. It is very often humor only because it is exceptional. Queerness is the badge of its genuineness. (692)

There may be no law for humor, but there are laws for interpreting what humor means for identity. Conservative men read *Harper's* one way; less conservative men read it in other ways. But while there may be no law for reading *Harper's* or for reading humor, Cox asserts, how one practices humor still determines how one will be perceived. That is the most important aspect of the interpellation implicit to the joking image, not that readers identify with one character or the other, or condemn one or the other, but instead that they believe their identity is inevitably linked to how they practice humor. As I note later in this chapter in my discussion of a *Harper's* humor column by David Ker, interpellation is the form of conversion by which humor is transformed into the matter of identity and by which "individuals" are transformed into "subjects" (Althusser 163).

The article goes on to illustrate a number of other identity-determined ways of practicing humor, but perhaps none so remarkable, or revealing, as this:

> "Fat men are always humorous," says one who has a theory.... But fun and fat do not necessarily go together. Moisture of the muscles and layers of lard have no more to do with humor than meat has with manhood.... If we are to judge of a man's jollity by the juiciness of his body, one would think an American to be the jolliest of mortals, for his salivary glands are in perpetual flux. (693)

Here, readers are finally introduced to a particular bodily quality (fatness) that is not related to a distinctive, classifiable humor practice, only to be offered a most peculiar description of the American national subject. In this weird passage, Cox's efforts to classify and hierarchize humor practice in terms of identity slip from his grasp and land with a distinctive thud; or perhaps one might say his efforts to classify character slip on the banana peel that captures humor practice's political slipperiness. The neat binary consistency of metaphor that permits him to distinguish between white and black, French and English, American and Spanish in earlier passages is lost as Cox raises gross images of meat, moisture, muscle, lard and juice that do not have clear opposites or counterparts (such as the relation between diamond and charcoal, civilization and savagery). Here, the anxious attempt to fix behavior in a particular way, and to subject it to the power of classificatory judgment, suggests that, if fatness is no sign of one's status in the humor hierarchy, then perhaps nationality too is no inevitable determinant or index of humor practice. Cox's clumsy effort discloses the instability of his entire project, but somehow turns the slip – just as in the classic slapstick banana peel trip – into another opportunity for asserting that Americans share something in common, even if it is only their perpetually fluxing salivary glands.[8]

Although I trenchantly maintain that, by virtue of beginning with Cox's article and *Harper's*, I am starting this story in the middle of things and do not wish to seek out an origin for the articulation of humor practice to national identity, I do want to suggest just how appropriate Cox's article is as a starting point for my study, noting once more that it is often cited in twentieth-century AHS projects as an early example of efforts to delineate how American humor practices relate to the national character. Published in

1875, the article and its argument appeared at the tail end of the Reconstruction period and just prior to the rebuilding and triumph of white supremacy in U.S. law. This reversal in law is perhaps most famously realized in the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1893 which brought about the infamous Jim Crow laws, but it was significantly prefigured, as Eric Sundquist notes, in "*United States* v. *Reese* (1876), *United States* v. *Cruikshank* (1876), and *United States* v. *Harris* (1883)," all of which "undermined federal jurisdiction in cases involving southern mob violence against blacks, in particular those attempting to exercise voting rights" (238): Although *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* famously avoided taking overt political stances for fear of alienating potential readers, Cox's article seems to make the case for the kind of work happening in the courts. If, as Sundquist notes of these law cases, "corresponding to the end of Reconstruction, the establishment of such a federal-state duality had the effect of drawing a stark color line" (238), then perhaps we might say that in the cultural ideological state apparatus of *Harper's* that same color line is reinforced through the absolutely unequal separation of the "charcoal" humor practice of blacks from the "diamond" humor practice of whites.

All of which is to say that while Cox's "American Humor" may not share a name with the *Mirths* or with *Birth*, it does share their purpose. Speaking of the blackface minstrel show, a popular form of humor practice in the nineteenth century that influenced representations of white and blacks on the stage and in print (and later in film, radio and television), Sundquist writes, in a passage worth quoting at length since it touches on so much that is key to my argument, of the importance of the post-Reconstruction shift on notions of the color line:

> The national popularity of minstrel shows in the 1880s and 1890s spilled over into nostalgic depictions of the antebellum South and "darky" characters in magazine fiction, theater, the novel, and the essay, testifying to a widely felt need, spurred by economic and political crises [crises occurring in and around the time of publication of Cox's essay], to resurrect a romantic image of the Old South. At times oblivious to the significant differences among southern writers, influential northerners such as William Dean Howells enthusiastically promoted the work of ideologically diverse authors, including Joel Chandler Harris, George Washington Cable, and Thomas Nelson Page [all of whom published in *Harper's*].... Exploiting this strategy, but in a way manifestly more racist than other southern romance, Thomas Dixon's saga of the Ku Klux Klan, especially *The Clansman* (1905), was widely popular just after the turn of the century in fiction and on stage, and of course a few years later became the basis for D.W. Griffith's famous film *The Birth of a Nation*. The tremendous success of Dixon's and Griffith's version of American race mythology would have been unthinkable without the sociological underpinnings of Jim Crow. (230-31)

Sundquist's insightful and precise history misses only the kind of work done *outside* fiction, but still in magazines, in essays like Cox's that also made possible the success of the "American race mythology" that Griffith asks us to remember in his film. If Cox's essay marks a kind of origin in American Humor Studies, then it is an origin that, appropriately enough, takes place during a moment of national anguish, anxiety, and crisis, when senses of nationalism were as complex as they were perplexed. Locating early AHS practice in relation to the fallout of the Civil War casts the effort to nationalize mirth in a whole new light, as if the drawing of the color line reconciled for the nation the erasure of the Mason-Dixon line in a bloody zero-sum game of white supremacy and union. The nationalist and racial politics of AHS, which are so mysteriously but fully captured in the accident of the irths, might be said to find their reason for being, the grounds of their stakes, in the context of a discourse emerging in the post-Reconstruction era that found legal expression in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and cultural expression in *Birth of a Nation*. In Cox's article, then, we witness an early and influential instance of the articulation of humor practice to identity in the interests of white supremacy.[9]

Henry Clay Lukens's April 1890 "American Literary Comedians" also appears frequently in the standard works of AHS. Like Cox, Lukens is invested in promoting the classification of cultural practice through the articulation of humor to national identity, though less overtly in the interests of white supremacy. Mostly documentary in purpose, Lukens's article links humor practice to nationality. Lukens achieves much of his article's apparent purpose in these opening sentences:

> That distinct quality of intellectual expression which aptly and most faithfully exhibits the habits, weakness, follies, or ludicrous peculiarities of a people has its broadest field in our own country. Here, too, is a ripe harvest. The population of a land made up, as ours is, of immigrants from every older nation and remote corner of the world, has elements as curious as they are variable, incongruous, and grotesque. Alert minds easily detect idiosyncrasies. What we call humor is a truthful mirroring of the odd or laughter provoking in ourselves. (783)

Like Cox's articles of fifteen years earlier, Lukens's piece relies on the belief in "distinct qualities" and humor's capacity to function as a "mirror" that reflects true (fixed) identity and thus indexes distinct national character.

Lukens focuses on distinctly "American" characteristics rather than on a range of international humor practices. However, like Cox, Lukens raises an international context to make his nationalist narrative. For instance, Lukens distinguishes American humor practice from that of other nations in a number of ways, the most obvious of which, for his purposes, is its sheer quantity: "humor (or what passes for it) not only permeates but actually saturates the bulk of America's wondrous type yield" (792), and "nowhere else is there so much silly grimace in print" (783). Hearkening back to as early as 1675, Lukens chronologically traces the "birth" of American humor to its modern practitioners, often writing lists of names for half-column after half-column with little or no commentary. The tactic is appropriate, since what the article surrenders in interest (lists are boring) it gains in effect by communicating through sheer force of numbers America's rich and plentiful humor history.

Distinct national humor practice may not be central to this article, but still Lukens's history links nation to humor. For instance, humor seems to have provided America with one of its earlier international successes, since "Franklin's undimmed influence, lustrously augmented fifty years later by Irving's popularity in England, caused a cloud-breaking in foreign prejudice, and won for American books, reviews, magazines and cheaper print a kindly reception in the libraries, clubs, and homes of Europe" (785). America's international print success is influenced, however, by the imagined relative youth of the nation, such that when "stepping across the threshold of the nineteenth century, we find our ambitious young literature [read: ambitious young nation] disposed to be noisy, at times coarse in its frolic, strident, uncouth, and lacking the gentle, harmonious elements of true humor" (786). The achievement of a "true humor" reflects a more mature nation: "From the misty past of American literary comedy I have plucked these names at random, because the quill-work which they identify best illustrates what the parents of our fathers and mothers laughed at. We of the present generation have a more dainty and varied feast" (788). Much like Cox, and much like later American humor scholarship, Lukens assumes a distinct national humor practice that marks national stages of development, progress and maturity. According to this argument, humor practice itself is subject to change, as is the imagined national body, but the body itself remains stable, identifiable, knowable, and American. Literary humor, here, is produced and appreciated by a progressing national collectivity, a national mind constituted itself (in part) by its production of, and response to, literary comedy.

Like "American Humor" and "American Literary Comedians," John Corbin's 1898 "How the Other Half Laughs" categorizes humor practices for the purposes of illustrating strictly hierarchized and easily distinguished nationalities (see figure four). In this article, however, sanctioned *Harper's* humor practices are as absently present as the mansions of the wealthy in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*. Corbin's description of New York's East Side residents and their distinctive humor practices argues for the unthreatening pleasantness of "Other" New Yorkers only to describe for what we might call the "*Harper's* half" – and those interested in becoming part of the *Harper's* half – how *not* to practice humor in the city or magazine. Like Cox in the 1870s and American

Humor Studies scholars in the twentieth century, however, Corbin in the 1890s understands humor practices in relation to a hierarchy of national characteristics.

Corbin's study of the entertainment industry in New York's East Side details how various nationalities living in particular neighborhoods expressed their imagined distinct characters through humor practice. Whether through a description of popular Italian comedians who spit on the shoes of their fellows, a practice Corbin notes "could scarcely have been an Americanism" (33), or through descriptions of "Yiddish" adaptations of popular *Harper's* tales, like "Thrilby" (39), readers learned about the other half who were distinguished from the *Harper's* half (and from "Americans") by race, nationality, local residence, and, just as crucially, laughter (see figure five). As a result, properly American humor (which meant, for most part, white and middle class urban humor) could confirm its own status by contrast to its fishy opposite (see figure six).

Corbin solves the problem of a threatening place on the map inhabited by threatening people who do threatening things by turning them into objects of knowledge and by classifying their humor practices along an implicit hierarchy of national characteristics. For instance, in response to a letter received from an actor that declares "I am perfectly convinced now that it is no use to work for the Italian people of America," Corbin writes: "Yet this is not the whole truth; thousands of Italians regard America as home, and by nature they are one of the most pleasure-loving of all our foreign colonies" (36). Corbin reassures the *Harper's* half that Italian people and their threatening practices are not likely to spill out of the East Side since the distinct national "nature" of these people is harmlessly pleasure loving, and because Italy is somehow an American foreign colony and implicitly subject to America's soon-to-be-labeled "Big

Stick" imperialism. Corbin goes on to ease imagined tensions (and the more he eases them the more they stand in the foreground and readers learn to identify such anxieties as constitutive of the subjectivity of the *Harper's* half) by noting of Italians that "even in the theatre they spoke to each other mainly in English," and, perhaps most importantly, "in seeking amusement they fall prey to the flash and glare of our variety bill posters [unlike the *Harper's* half who know how to read mass culture's print productions]. The new generation, who lack the traditions of the home country, and sometimes the knowledge of Italy to appreciate its drama, are almost certain to become Americanized in their tastes" (36).

Corbin elaborates this narrative of national conversion to justify his hierarchical categorization of humor practices and to underline the important politics that motivate his methodology. After describing an encounter with a man who complains that reporters often turn Bowery residents "into ridicule," Corbin writes:

> I pointed out that it is a reporter's business to speak of the amusing things he finds, and added that I was interested to know what he had to say about the life of the foreign people in America. "Ah!" he exclaimed, with quick intuition, "I see you will turn me into ridicule. I don't care. By-and-by I will write about you." I accept the challenge; and if I am provincial enough to find keen delight in the strange people and strange sights I met, I stand in danger of swift retribution. If we laugh first, it behooves us to laugh heartily as we can, for these Yiddish people are hot on our trail in the arts as well as in commerce. (38)

If nations, as Benedict Anderson and Lauren Berlant have argued, are communities imagined through national symbols like monuments, traditions, and holidays, then they are also made up of locales – such as New York's East Side – that confirm by contrast the symbolic boundaries of national behavior even as they reinforce the territorial boundaries of the geographic nation. For Corbin, humor practices bring nationality into focus, as expressions of a natural national character that despite its naturalness is subject to conversion through colonization. To be sure, Corbin's tale registers a powerful ambivalence with regards to nationalism in which humor practices are subject to change-by-conquest even as they are forever locked into a rigged and discriminatory evaluative hierarchy; humor practices remain, however, inevitably constitutive of an unambivalently asserted national identity.

These three articles are not unique but instead representative of a nationalistic discourse, already common in nineteenth-century U.S. mass culture, that articulated national identity to humor practice. This articulation, which remained key for twentieth-century American Humor Studies, produces national identity through ontology and hierarchy, converting humor practices (and representations of humor practices) into the constitutive properties of a national subjectivity. American humor, for *Harper's* and, as I will now show, for AHS, meant American identity.[10]

Inventing American Humor Studies

The articulation of humor practice to national identity that drove *Harper's* reporting and criticism in the late nineteenth century found fruitful purchase in twentieth-century U.S. academia. Most AHS histories, after acknowledging the influence of articles like Cox's, pinpoint the field's formal emergence with two seminal works from the 1930s that brought academic legitimacy to the study of humor, inspiring a host of scholars to research, historicize and theorize folk and mass humor history: Constance Rourke's 1931 *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*, and Walter Blair's 1937 *Native American Humor*. The titles of these works, like their similarly titled nineteenth-century magazine counterparts, and even more so than the *Mirths*, efficiently announce their scholarly dedication to the production and maintenance of a national U.S. identity through the study of humor. This commitment is consistent with scholarly practice of the period that imagined literary and folk history as instruments for gauging the exceptional and unique status of the United States. AHS was thus formed in a context that articulated academic study to national interests and humor practice to a knowable national identity or "native character."

These two books, like the *Harper's* articles, were efforts to turn a traditional understanding of "character" to account in the interests of the nation. As Thomas Augst explains in "The Coin of Character," a section in his book on young men's literary practices, *The Clerk's Tale*, "character"

> originally referred to the impress or stamp used in the minting of coins, where malleable material acquires its distinctive features. When John Locke used the term in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), it still retained its association with the process of imprinting, writing, and engraving.... Locke's theories of education and psychological development would develop the figurative implications of this metaphor. As the mind is shaped by experience, so too generally would the "metal" of human nature acquire, through the impress of education, its distinctive type as the "coin" of character. This etymology may

> explain the repeated allusions to the printing process in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* when he discusses the acquisition of "credit and character." Franklin describes various regrets as "errata," which, like the careless mistakes of a typesetter, deviate from the uniform and reproducible standard of the virtuous life. (25)

Augst's history highlights the metaphorical nature of "character" and its figurative link to mechanical practices of printing, a link I will exploit more thoroughly in the second chapter; here, I want to underscore just how much was at stake for Rourke and Blair when they chose to articulate humor practice to national character. Inventing national character, for instance, brings into play identity and ethics; as Augst notes, "by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, character.... [implied moral] qualities that through some combination of heredity and influence marked a person as individual and unique. In this sense, character became linked with the ancient rhetorical concept of *ethos*, which described a person's structure of motives, feelings, and thoughts that cause action and to which we impute moral responsibility" (25). Character, then, whether applied to an individual or a nation, is invested with notions of identity and responsibility. To be without a character – and for Rourke and Blair, and Cox and Lukens and Corbin, to be without a national character – is to be a blank page, to be of no account, to not exist in any meaningful sense, and certainly not in a unique or exceptional sense. So when Rourke, Blair and the *Harper's* writers convert humor practices into expressions of distinct national characteristics, they are coining humor, turning humor to account by inventing or casting the shape of America, making the nation recognizable and knowable, granting it identity and responsibility. The particular shape that character takes is subject to debate and change, but that there is a national character is itself not questioned. This is a significant part of what is at stake for Rourke and Blair in their efforts to identify (that is, invent) an American national character, and it goes a long way to explaining why AHS scholars, who typically understand scholarship as a kind of national duty, remain so trenchantly committed to working out the shape of that character.

In addition to establishing American humor as a knowable object available for study and as an institutional field in line with national interests, both 1930s books historicize humor through influential classifications. Indeed, classification remains today a pivotal methodology, and the Rourke/Blair categories still influence histories of American humor. Rourke classifies "the national character" and its relation to humor through three overarching categories of typically American humor figures: the Yankee, the frontiersman, and the blackface minstrel. Each figure is understood to represent a form of American humor that exerts continuing pressure on American literary and folk history, constituting how the national character is represented and constituting that character itself. In addition to promoting this ontologizing methodology, Rourke puts forward the argument, inspirational for the field, that one cannot address the history of the United States without addressing the history of its folk and literary humor practices. Rourke converts humor practices into the materials of a knowable national character through the form of academically reputable historical analysis and classification, producing the history and character *American Humor* apparently discovers.

Like *American Humor*, *Native American Humor* argues for a knowable, distinct American character that is registered in historical humor practices, though Blair's book applies a more intense, perhaps more scholarly focus on the literary and material history of humor practice in the U.S. Like Rourke, Blair employs a classificatory methodology, defining four types of nineteenth-century American humor that make up "native" American humor and continue to exert pressure on how American humor develops through history. These four categories, still commonly employed by AHS scholars, are: Down East humor, the humor of the Old Southwest, Literary Comedy, and Local Color (or regionalism). Also like Rourke, Blair implies that American history (which means the history of Americans becoming distinct from the people of other nations) is importantly made up of distinct humor practices.

What really binds these two works together is their effort to articulate the study of humor practices to academic nationalistic endeavor via the conversion of humor practices into a national literary and folk tradition (to employ Hobsbawm's terminology). By producing categories of American humor and essential American character they participated in the same tradition as their *Harper's* counterparts, helping to make "Americans" an identifiable group knowable by their behavior and distinct within an international context. Such efforts were further aided by Rourke and Blair's implicit insistence that American Humor Studies, as a field, must answer the question, What makes humor American? or, alternatively, What are the qualities of humor practice in America that are distinctly American? As historians such as Reising, Lauter, Baym, Shumway, Graff and Noble have noted, much literary scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century was dedicated to legitimating the study of American literature as a professional endeavor of value to the nation and to establishing the existence of a distinct American literature. Rourke and Blair founded the study of American humor within this context, producing representative American types of humor to establish the existence of an American character grounded in the experience, performance, representation and evaluation of humor.

This ideological approach to the academic study of humor is practiced throughout the history of AHS, an approach which, by virtue of the field's "American" name, some might argue would be difficult for scholars to avoid.[11] Below, I trace the influence of the *Harper's*/Blair/Rourke model on a few of the most major AHS productions and some of its more recent book-length studies. My effort is not to offer a comprehensive overview of the field, but instead to consider a few oft-cited studies that indicate the impact of the Rourke/Blair methodology on the field and to track the consequences of this influence, consequences registered, in part, in the accident of the irths.

One of the most oft-cited AHS book-length studies after Rourke and Blair's influential works is Jesse Bier's weird, lengthy 1968 *The Rise and Fall of American Humor*. Unlike Rourke and Blair's texts, Bier's book spends only about a third of its time in the nineteenth century, choosing instead, in light of the claim that "the twenties and thirties represent a culmination in American humor" (208), to trace a "rise" of American humor to a pinnacle represented by people like H.L. Mencken, Charlie Chaplin, James Thurber and Dorothy Parker, and institutions like *The New Yorker*. The 1920s and 30s represent a "culmination" because at this time American humor was at its most vigorous, its most socially and politically complex, and its most technically proficient (note that this period also coincides with the foundation of twentieth-century American humor studies). Much of the rest of the book is spent sourly complaining about modern American humor, arguing that most of this work "ultimately fails" (hence the "fall" of the title).[12] Bier's most striking claim for my history is that the periods in which American humor "flourished" correspond to periods of communal nationalistic enterprise:

> These periods happen to correspond to our most successfully purposeful stages of national development: our crucial expansion and democratization under Jackson, our maintenance of union under Lincoln and our economic consolidation afterward, and our definition of sociopolitical national character under Franklin Roosevelt.... A spirit of confidence and objectivity allows the maximum comic criticism. What is operative in these periods is a profound security or assurance felt in the pursuit of national goals, an undeniably insurgent or resurgent feeling of power or of oncoming victory.... Objectivity and confidence are the major psychic conditions for a sense of humor, on any level. (28-29)

Here the echoes of Cox, Rourke and Blair are clear, even if their theories and methodologies have been transformed into the materials of a more complex history (reminiscent of Lukens) that not only takes humor practice as a register of national character but also takes humor *quality* as a register of national achievement.

In 1978 another major tome promised to accrue repute to the field by fixing the study of humor in the United States permanently to such established AHS beliefs: Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill's 529-page *America's Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury.* Supposedly an effort to document the history of American humor, the book, dedicated "to our wives, without whose nagging this book would never have been completed," contains but a handful of pages dealing with women writers. As this lack suggests (a lack very similar to Henry Clay Lukens's history of almost a century earlier), efforts to recognize the contribution of women writers to the American folk and literary scene were struggling for legitimacy in the academic context of the late 1970s, but even so Blair and Hill's effort is startling for its studied, deliberate exclusion. What they were doing was paying homage – basically through repetition – to the traditions of AHS, and practicing that field as it had almost invariably been practiced for half a century, or even longer, given the similarity between their approach and that of Cox and Lukens. AHS had evolved to a certain extent since the field's crystallization into an institutional scholarly formation in the 1930s, but the traditional forms and purposes of intellectual inquiry, which were set up much earlier, remained stubbornly present. The publication of the book marks a watershed in the history of AHS, not for its consolidation but instead its division of the field, for, while this traditional tome was received as a triumph by some, heralding the coming of age of AHS, for others it signaled the desperate need for more informed and professional consideration of literary and folk history. Griffith's *Birth* still inspires filmmakers to challenge white supremacist stereotypes and historical narratives that pervade mass entertainment in the United States, and so does Blair and Hill's *America's Humor* still motivate scholars to write the history AHS traditionally ignores.[13]

The most often cited among the studies that work against the exclusions of *America's Humor* is Nancy Walker's 1988 *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture*. Walker's book intervenes in the field by arguing that there is a separate and distinct "female tradition" within American humor that is politically shrewd and stylistically complex. Even that tradition's reliance on stereotypes becomes grounds for such complexity, given Walker's premise that women writers resisted stereotypes through subversion, relying on them only to reverse them. Walker's book, and with it much other writing motivated by the sexist and racist lack of *America's Humor* (these include Linda A. Morris's 1988 *Women Vernacular Humorists in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner's 1988 anthology, *Redressing the Balance: American Women's Literary Humor from Colonial Times to the 1980s*, Mel Watkins's 1994 *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying -- The Underground Tradition of African-American Humor that Transformed American Culture, From Slavery to Richard Pryor*, and, to a lesser extent, Daryl Dumber Dance's explicitly non-academic and non-AHS 1998 anthology *Honey, Hush!: An Anthology of African American Women's Humor*), however, do not challenge the key AHS belief in distinct characters and distinct traditions located around American identity. That is to say, Walker and others challenge Blair and others on the level of what identities will be included as distinct and American, but they do not challenge the basic assumption that humor practices reflect an essentialized, knowable and distinct identity and that the job of American Humor Studies is to identify these characteristics. In these works, the need remains for classification and typing; the need remains for relatively stable identities (men's, women's); and the need remains for evaluative criticism that privileges literary "complexity" and "wholeness," and nationalist exceptionalism, over other available histories, such as the history of the relations between humor practice and mass culture.

Thus while *America's Humor* did indeed provoke, through its racist and sexist lack, an influential shift in the field, it still prolonged the longevity of the *Harper's*/Rourke/Blair methodology, rendering future explorations uniform with old ones. This influence registers in former AHSA president David E.E. Sloane's introduction and afterword to the 1998 anthology *New Directions in American Humor* (itself the product of a 1994 AHS conference). Sloane begins his introduction to an exploration of supposedly new directions with the oldest AHS question of all: "Is there an *American* humor?" (emphasis original). This dusty query is followed by similarly old-fashioned assertions of distinctly American humor practices:

> Plainly, humor is a crucial aspect of our culture. In what other country but this – the (at least for now) most powerful nation in the world – could a head of state begin an eight-year tenure in office with a joke, as Ronald Reagan did in his State of the Union message.... Would a prime minister of Japan begin his career thus? Would Helmut Kohl of Germany present his outlook on the status of German culture in such a metaphor? For Reagan, the speech was one of many triumphs that led to his title "The Great Communicator".... Whether or not American humor is different qualitatively from other nations' humor is a vexed and vexing question. (1)

The question may be vexed in the sense that the answers are still subject to debate, but the status of the question as the centre of AHS debate remains notably unvexed. The old fashioned Blair/Rourke classificatory methodology, too, remains: Sloane's afterword puts forward a strange "unified theory of American humor" with five, listed, "distinct" "categories" or "levels" of humor (249-57), in a profoundly conservative effort to make the supposedly new directions entirely beholden to the old ones.[14] Even more oddly, Sloane's writing style sounds very similar to that of Cox and Lukens, registering a durability in style and politics that accounts in part for the accident of the irths:

> Humor occupies a central place in American discourse. Both major and minor authors become potentially valuable in understanding the "American" way of thinking – past, present, and future. By the next century, studies of humor will be

> substantially broadened – using the academic analyst's tools – beyond the belletristic. The success of this enterprise will tell us much about our national beliefs. (258)

Thus, even though Sloane asserts that in the field's future "a wide variety of inquiries are called for" (256), nonetheless his new directions remain securely fashioned to the old ones. "American humor may travel far differently than we presume; few if any full-scale studies have been devoted to this subject, vital as it is to our projection of American ideals to other nations" (258).

Sloane's commitment to conservative models for studying humor practice erupts in this bizarre acknowledgement of and resistance to historical change:

> The humorist's lot is a hard one, particularly when she or he is "not funny," as feminists responded to female-insensitive housewife and secretary jokes, which were a staple of earlier humor. We are now in an era where a standard, and never-challenged, comment of males to each other during the 1930s to the 1950s ("When rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it") threatened the job of Indiana University's basketball coach Bobby Knight – even though basketball is king in the region where he is located. (248)

Change takes place, according to this passage, in a context that renders (through clumsy rhetoric) this "era" exceptional to a fantastic history of supposedly never-challenged comments, staples, kings, and humorously-articulated rape. What remains consistent here is a cruel nostalgia similar to the one that permits the *Mirths* to pun on *Birth* as if that film inspires and cites only fun and not disaster. A determined refusal to interrogate any of the politics of American humor other than those that pertain to the issue of national character permits Sloane to express this lapsarian narrative about how it was easier to be funnier in the old days, in much the same way as Griffith once wistfully remembered how it used to be easier to be white.

AHS scholars like Sloane are right to claim, as they often do, the crucial role literary and folk humor play in the history of the United States, and they are similarly right to claim that much humor scholarship deserves attention. They can even point to such encouraging moments as Bernard DeVoto's review of Blair's *Native American Humor*, which notes that the book "must hereafter be taken into account in all critical study of American literature at large" (qtd. in Clark and Turner 9). But Blair's book, and along with it most American humor scholarship, has received little to no attention from critical studies of American literature "at large." This, sadly, despite the field's determined devotion to older academic practices and literary models. So it is that a glance at some of the major surveys and theories of "American literature" reveals how little influence AHS might claim on the academic study of American literature or culture. A quick look through seven representative, influential works -- F.O. Matthiessen's 1941 *American Renaissance*, Howard Mumford Jones's 1948 *The Theory of American Literature*, R.W.B. Lewis's 1955 *The American Adam*, Richard Chase's 1957 *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, Leslie A. Fiedler's 1960 *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leo Marx's 1964 *The Machine in the Garden*, and Sacvan Bercovitch's 1975 *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* -- opens relatively poor vaults for the optimistic history of influence and relevance AHS historians imagine. Lewis, Fiedler, and Bercovitch mention neither Rourke nor Blair, and spend little if any time on American humor. In fact, only Matthiessen and Marx cite Blair's *Native American*

Humor (in footnotes). Just over half of them mention Rourke and her *American Humor*. Jones lists Rourke's book in his bibliography of "selected list of works on the history and philosophy of American literature"; Chase opens his book with a reference to, in quotation marks, "American Humor" (1) and cites Rourke's writing on Hawthorne and Melville; Matthiessen notes a heavy debt to Rourke's work on Davy Crockett; while Marx calls *American Humor* "seminal," "a study of the pastoral impulse in its most nearly pure indigenous form" (132-33).[15] What currency AHS may have once commanded in academia never circulated much outside its closed domain. That is to say, while making humor American has been a vastly successful articulation outside the academy (a success registered in the 2000 Thurber House/HarperCollins *Mirth*), it has never been much successful at securing support even from traditional American Studies academics.[16]

Reading this general lack of citation in the broader field of American Studies is difficult, since such neglect probably involves a general tendency to rank humor somewhere "below" supposedly more significant artistic achievements. It is clear, however, that the contemporary effort to maintain AHS methodological tradition operates on a wrongheaded assumption about the historical impact of the field and therefore on an unprofitable devotion to bankrupt traditions. And I think this "characteristic" of AHS, as much as the field's effort to articulate humor to the nation, accounts for the accident of the *Births*, for the books and the movie all subscribe to a nationalistic, racialized ideology that will not be forgotten. The mutual assertion of origin and birth on the one hand, and claim to relevance and new directions on the other, highlights the ghostlike qualities of AHS traditions, which, like *Birth's* nostalgia for the antebellum South, discover not the beginning of life but instead only life after death. Like ghosts rattling windows, closing doors and upsetting cups, the irths and the AHS field suffer from unfruitful frustration at their determined, unquiet refusal to acknowledge not the loss of their future, but the impending loss of their past.[17]

America's National Humors

This section is intended to briefly touch on alternative approaches to understanding the relations between American humor and the nation. The point, after all, of exploring the connections between AHS and the irths is not to deny a meaningful national context for humor practice, but instead to historicize just how nationalist AHS has always been, even when it operated under the auspices of objective scholarship. What is brought into the horizon when the old AHS questions, and nationalist motivations, are set aside? What happens when we consider popular American humorists without categorizing them in an exceptionalist nationalist hierarchy? What happens when we shift the terms of the discussion from humor as an expression of national character to humor industry products as expressions and instances of the relations between humor practice and nationalism in a capitalist marketplace, a marketplace shifting dynamically with the emergence of mass culture? In a sense, these questions are explored by all that follows in this dissertation; for now, I want to end the chapter by highlighting three works that, when taken out of the traditional AHS methodological apparatus, become exemplary instances of the value of – and need for – a less nationalist, but still in an important sense nationalized, approach to the history of humor practice in the United States.

The "Editor's Drawer," with which my fourth chapter deals extensively, was one of the most popular humor departments in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and, though often accused of a dusty irrelevance, was nonetheless an important player in the 1890s humor industry. A look at some of its humor which directly related to the nation (that is, for which the nation was the profitable subject matter) should resonate throughout the dissertation and provide a fine instance of how the humor industry related to the nation and to nationalism as subject materials. Like much humor from the period, then, the Drawer related humor practice to national identity, and, in doing so, worked in tandem with the articles of Cox, Lukens, and Corbin to assert the existence of distinct national characteristics indexed by distinct humor practices. The Drawer linked the practice of humor to nationality, race and region in many of its jokes, anecdotes and cartoons, as surely as AHS labored to secure comparably politicized links. This tendency strikingly manifested itself in the regular contributions of David Ker, a freelance author working out of England. Writing for somewhere under half of the Drawers from 1889 to 1893, Ker contributed short anecdotal pieces that detailed forms of humor from around the world, noticeably distant from the New York home of *Harper's* and many of its readers. Surrounded by humorous materials that addressed readers as particular kinds of people distinguished by their nationality, Ker's column not only entertained readers with a broad range of jokes but also provided them with a blueprint for understanding themselves as a cohesive group whose identity could be confirmed by contrast to their otherworldly, international counterparts.

It is worth noting here that the Drawer's 1890s editor, Harper's house humorist and bestselling humor book author John Kendrick Bangs, understood humor in explicitly nationalist terms. As his son, Francis Bangs, writes in the biography of his father,

> Bangs was interested in humor not merely as an end in itself but as a means to an end. He believed that the humorist had reason to be proud of his calling. He did not agree with Matthew Arnold that the American humorist was a national calamity. He maintained that "in the whole history of our humor, from Captain John Smith through Franklin, Irving, Lowell, and Artemus Ward, to Mark Twain, Bill Nye, Ade, and Dunne, we have shown an exuberance of feeling and a resentment of restraint, that have helped to make of us the free and independent people that we are." Bangs further held that nations without humor were unstable communities, and that it was only after the people of a nation developed a sense of humor that that nation could be registered upon the roll call of civilization. (280-81)

This remarkable position, which lays out in direct terms precisely the position of many AHS scholars, is the more remarkable still for its obvious absence, that is, its determined effort to leave profit out of the "ends" humor might serve. As the most prominent humor editor at the house, Bangs had a profound impact on humor production in the 1890s. For him, humor is not only an expression of a unique national character, but also in fact an important cause of freedom and independence.

Ker's columns need to be understood within the context of this nationalism-saturated editorial ideology and practice. A representative column is the September 1890 "Pease and Needles." The short piece begins with a familiar Ker device, and a familiar

Drawer device, for addressing readers personally while producing the fiction that *Harper's* readers constituted a distinct and recognizable readership: "Everyone is now familiar with the story of the German farmer who…." (648). This clever form of personal address is actually a form of generic address in which "everyone," presumably, might desire to be included. While such openings entail a kind of slipperiness – if one is not familiar with the story one might just as well become alienated from the magazine, rather than rendered anxious and drawn to it for relief – they were so generic to the Drawer they were almost a kind of signature. Richard Ohmann writes that elite magazines like *Harper's* did little to teach their readers (6-8), but in this kind of address *Harper's* seems to work along much the same lines as its ten-cent magazine counterparts, addressing readers as particular kinds of people in order to make those readers into those people, at the same time as those readers sometimes energetically sought such guidance. An average *Harper's* reader (if there ever was such a person) may not have felt a desire to rise or conform with the same urgency as ten-cent magazine readers striving to attain a place in the emerging professional managerial class, but nonetheless *Harper's* here addresses readers as if they are concerned with much the same issues as their supposedly lower counterparts. In this sense and in this context, humor writings relate to the nation not as instances of unique American folk practice but instead as profitable instances of "the national character," as valuable means through which to enjoy jokes, theorize national identity, and sell magazines.

The story of the German farmer is a tale of exchange with an ironic twist: a farmer presents a prince with an enormous turnip and receives a handsome sum of money in return. Another farmer, hoping too for financial reward, presents a magnificent horse to the prince only to receive the giant turnip in return. After detailing the familiar narrative, Ker links it to another far-away national scene: "But a still more striking instance of this peculiar style of repayment is recorded in an Asiatic legend, which, though little known in the West, may often be heard in the East from the bearded lips of some mountain warrior of Khorassan or Afghanistan" (648). The story details how Alexander the Great once humiliated a buffoonish Eastern learned man. In the "legend," an Eastern pundit claims to have achieved the impossible, and, referring to a cliché regarding the placing of a pea on the head of a pin, demonstrates before Alexander how after a year of dedicated practice he can now place a pea in such a manner at will. Alexander pretends to be impressed and remarks, after some sarcastic praise, "Ho, there! Give quickly to this worker of wonders *a packet of needles and a sack of pease*" (648, italics original). Like many Drawer jokes, as I will note in chapter four, both the German and the Afghan tales of exchange gone awry are disciplinary in the sense that they explain proper and improper manners of social behavior, and detail the shame and reward that result from such behavior. Here, the tales distinguish American humor and tales of exchange from their exotic others, but also draw a point of connection – on the level of commerce –between nations. The point here, after all, is that both jokes, though distinctly foreign, remain funny even when they cross international borders. It is in this sense that Ker's column should be read as contradictory: the column holds up familiar notions of national hierarchy and difference, but also asserts that exchanges of capital are inevitable and universal (we all understand these jokes of exchange as jokes of exchange), and so promotes international points of connection that rely on more than nationalist exceptionalism and difference.

Theories of international relations are raised time and again in Ker's "Drawer" columns. In June 1890, Ker published a column entitled "A Mohammedan 'Joe Miller,'" which he begins with a set of curious international connections:

> The comic pre-eminence held by Tyll Enlenspiegel in Germany and by Joe Miller in England is in Moslem lands assigned to a certain "Nasr'-ed-Din El Khojah," who, though probably as mythical as the Eastern Sultan whose court jester he is said to have been, has become a household word among all Mussulman races from the Ganges to the Atlantic. To this day, whenever you hear a hearty laugh from a listening ring of Arab traders, Afghan peasants, or Egyptian porters, you may be pretty certain that some threadbare jest of Nasr'-ed-Din El Khojah is the cause of the merriment.
>
> Not a few of this worthy's jokes have become stock anecdotes in an English version, and those who repeat them would doubtless be greatly surprised to learn that the bare-limbed savages of Asiatic and African deserts were laughing at these very same stories 600 years ago. (*Harper's*, June 1890, 162)

Here, English, German and American humor are traced to a mythical source in the East, establishing a discursive genealogy that does not argue for American exceptionalism but rather for wide-reaching global intimacies fostered by the tendency of jokes to repeat themselves *ad nauseam*.

But such an argument for a shared history of wit, even this explicit, is accompanied by the "great surprise" one might feel at realizing this history. Thus, while the piece implicitly maintains an interconnected, international history of humor practice, Ker's column playfully suggests America's place in a global community while stoutly asserting the crucial difference between "bare-limbed savages" and the finely clothed, magazine reading characters who populate the surrounding cartoons and represent *Harper's* readers to themselves. As in Cox's racialized humor history, similarity here is asserted only to claim a much more important difference. Ker addresses his readers as subjects who believe in a racialized hierarchy that assumes no connection between savages and *Harper's* readers or Americans. It is because of this assumption that readers are expected to be surprised – greatly surprised – by the point of connection Ker draws. The surprise, then, is not meant to push readers to rethink their racialized sense of identity, but instead to identify a characteristic of the assumed *Harper's* reader. This is a fine line to walk, but it is often traced with precision by Ker and the Drawer, serving the interests of a magazine devoted to securing profit through the reading practices of a predictable, identifiable readership.

In the 1890s magazine industry, when writers, editors and advertisers were busy inventing and responding to an emerging professional-managerial class, humor became a subject through which a profitable national identity could be expressed. In this sense, magazines like *Harper's* sold identity (recall the image of the "Two Readers of Harper" and Corbin's other half) to a readership that looked to magazines for cues and advice on how to live in the Progressive Era U.S. Thus, readers could purchase *Harper's* not only to pleasantly assert their racial, class, and national allegiance, but also to participate in the always necessary *reassertion* of these identities. Humor, indeed, had much to do with nationalism, but not so much as a natural expression of a distinct national character as a clever response to imagined readerly desires that fit together with the interests of capital – in other words, as an ideologically and economically productive engagement with the emerging mass culture. Ker's columns do open up the possibility of a non-exceptionalist, globally shared history of humor practice, but for the most part reinscribe the same ideology we saw in the *Harper's* humor articles and in traditional AHS.

This reinscription, it is worth noting, functions through a kind of hail or interpellation that relies on the distinctly affective response of the humorous "surprise" Ker tells us we are supposed to feel at realizing the supposedly unlikely, or incongruous, international history of humor practice. Indeed, here *Harper's* is acting precisely as a communications and cultural ideological state apparatus that must reproduce the means of its own reproduction even as it produces (Althusser 123, 137). That is to say, Ker and *Harper's* are practicing a specifically institutional form of production that fashions subjectivities through commodified humor. This is an excellent example of Althusser's claim that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions'.... by that very precise operation.... [called] *interpellation* or hailing" (163). In the terms of my project, Ker and *Harper's* take a supposedly common sense of the racialized history of humor practice, contradict it through anecdote, and then *convert* it through the *form* of interpellation into a joke that itself should produce subjects who will appreciate the joke and buy into the magazine's approach to identity and hopefully buy the next month's issue. As Althusser notes with regard to ideological state apparatuses, "what matters is how they function.... [and they] *function 'by ideology'*" (138 emphasis original), interpellating readers as believing in a nationally specific ideology that is humorously and surprisingly but not threateningly violated by a joke about a shared history of wit. The real joke readers are instructed to appreciate is not the one told by Nasr'-ed-Din El Khojah, but the fact that he tells the same jokes as Tyll Enlenspiegel and Joe Miller.

Marietta Holley, with whom I deal more extensively in the next chapter, was one of the most popular humorists from the 1890s, and one whose exceptionalist nationalism, like that of *Harper's* and Ker, certainly helped to sell books. For Holley, however, humor and nationalism were not only opportunities to make money and maintain a racialized national identity, but also occasions for promoting women's rights in the United States. For instance, her popular 1893 humor book, *Samantha at the World's Fair*, expresses a fervently held national pride and articulates that pride to the necessity of promoting greater rights for women, most importantly women's right to vote. The book sees Holley's popular first-person narrator, Samantha Allen (who ironically refers to herself as "Josiah Allen's Wife"), journeying to the Chicago World's Fair. This famous fair, which was intended to celebrate Columbus' 1492 discovery of America while promoting the nation's (and Chicago's) industrial might, represents a flashpoint for the Progressive Era (and the subject of many American Studies projects), framed as it was by a financial crisis that would deeply impact the national economy for years and by the devastating and polarizing Pullman strike. Samantha tours through the Fair, recording its wonders for her readers in her familiar dialect-driven, common-sense humor, while speculating on what the fair means for the nation and for women. Spending much time touring and admiring the famous women's pavilion, the suffragist Samantha articulates popular humor to nationalism in the interests of promoting women's rights.

The book opens with a dedication that reveals Holley's political project:

> To Columbia – who has jest sailed out and discovered woman. And to the sect discovered *this book is dedicated.*

Written in Samantha's trademark dialect, and including one of her trademark dialect-double-words (sect = sex), the dedication signals ironically the belatedness of Columbia's discovery of a sect that has always existed (and perhaps then Columbus' discovery of a similarly ancient continent) and also expresses the lighthearted hope that this discovery will be good for the development of that "sect." Unlike Ker's columns, which express an alternative politics unconsciously, Holley's promotion of women's rights in the United States is an explicit, worked out political program. At the close of the book, just prior to a sappy farewell to Columbus, who Samantha hopes is off in the peaceful cosmos exploring unopposed, Samantha lectures a U.S. Governor on important matters of state; and throughout the book, she implores readers to "raise our skirts and wade back into history," or, if that is too difficult, "keep in the shaller water of a few short fleetin' months," and catalogue "the rotten political doin's, the unjust laws prevailin' in regard to female wimmen, and also the onrighteousness of the liquor laws and the abomination of the license question" (114-15). The point, which is repeated almost ad nauseam throughout the lengthy tome, is that the America Columbus discovered and imagined – an America of peace, freedom, and religion – has been betrayed by unjust laws that privilege men and the rich.

The humorous context of these expressions neatly captures the multiple registers from which such humor writing can be appreciated in its relation to the nation. Not simply an expression of a national humor tradition, or of a national woman's tradition, Holley's book is the product of a hardworking popular humorist whose nationalism sold books in a tradition of commodified popular culture irreducible to the "nation" or to gender – and also of a committed suffragist who linked nationalism and humor to promote U.S. women's rights.

Popular humorist Bill Nye's 1894 *Bill Nye's History of the United States*, illustrated by sometimes *Harper's* artist Frederick Opper, trades on a nationalism like Holley's, one that expresses criticism of conventional national histories while working to reproduce them. This book is a good example of how easily and often the American nation, and American history, were converted into profitable material for humorists and how that presumably somewhat cynical motive also left room for alternative visions of the national past. A beautifully illustrated and bound book, Nye's history tells in the author's familiar one-liners and quips, and in broad, non-threatening humorous strokes, a familiar history of the United States that, while somewhat critical of the treatment of African-Americans, Native Americans, and "Chinamen," implicitly expresses the nation's cruel history of oppression as the result of a kind of childlike innocence that sometimes stepped over the line (abolitionists are accused of having never seen an African-American outside of a minstrel show [248]). Insofar as the book relies, too, on a racialized hierarchy, it trades on familiar articulations of national identity to white supremacist ideology.[18]

Nye's most explicit political commentary, however, is reserved for a profound dislike of war. As the narrative enters the Civil War, Nye explains how war serves the interests of capital:

> Of course after we have been drawn into the fight and been fined and sent home, we like to maintain that we were fighting for our home, or liberty, or the flag, or something of the kind. We hate to admit that, as a nation, we fought and paid for

> it afterwards with our family's bread-money just because we were irritated. That's natural; but most great wars are arranged by people who stay at home and sell groceries to the widow and orphan and old maids at one hundred per cent. advance. (250)

Indeed, all wars in Nye's history are tied to capital, including and perhaps especially wars fought between colonizers and colonized:

> The Black Hawk War occurred in the Northwest Territory in 1832. It grew out of the fact that the Sacs and Foxes sold their lands to the United States and afterwards regretted that they had not asked more for them: so they refused to vacate, until several of them had been used up on the asparagus beds of the husband-man. (219)

What Nye's lighthearted but brutal history suggests, when read through the light of my approach to "American humor" as produced through an industry for the marketplace, is how nationalism presented humorists with golden opportunities not just to secure capital, and shore up hegemonic racial ideology, but also to critique capital's role in war by noting how "the flag" can be turned into an excuse by capitalists for exploitation of the nation itself.

The humor industry's relations to nationalist discourse still obtain in mass culture today; indeed, widely-circulated humor and nationalism remain two of the major modes of modern discourse, as profitable for the entertainment industry as for advertising. Humor, too, remains an imaginative source for global politics: UNESCO, drawing on an internationally celebrated mythical figure for humor and wisdom, declared 1996 "Nasreddin Hodja Year" to mark the possibilities humor holds for fostering international peace and understanding. Drawing on Nasreddin's ancient, international reputation as a humorous wise man, UNESCO felt this figure could stand as a rallying point, or model, for international relations. This effort is distinctly different from that of the June 1890 *Harper's* "Editor's Drawer" tale of Nasreddin, which invoked the jester as an example of humor's capacity to mark distinct national characteristics rather than to encourage global solidarity. From Marietta Holley's articulation of humor to nationalism and to women's rights, from Bill Nye's humorous historicization of the causes of U.S. wars, to the 1890s magazines and newspapers that shaped mass culture, to modern television and movies, the humor industry remains a key source for imagining national and international "character" and relations, but not only in the way that American Humor Studies and the late-nineteenth-century *Harper's* would have it. Telling the history of this industry's relations to nationalism challenges academic fields, such as the traditional AHS, that insist on articulating humor practice to exceptional national and racial identities, and perhaps builds on other available articulations that draw the international into view and refuse hierarchical classifications of national and racial identity.

NOTES

[1] Blair's introduction identifies his anthology as the product of efforts to preserve and promote nineteenth-century dialect humor in danger of being forgotten despite its vast popularity in the nineteenth century, its profound influence on major authors like Mark Twain, and its founding role in the still-read genre of realism. This effort to cure popular, literary and historical forgetfulness is realized through a remarkable, contradictory editorial practice that "sympathetically translates" or "modernizes" a collection of different nineteenth-century dialect styles by turning them into a single style supposedly more palatable for the 1980s reader. Blair and McDavid join notions of "great" writing, "America," and "history" to remember a national past, but do so by converting the material under recovery into something new and of a piece with the neglectful modernity they decry. Their effort to remember through modernization and alteration, perhaps unwillingly, sets in relief the impossibility of recovery for acts of preservation that are always acts of conversion.

[2] Perhaps not surprisingly, I have run across a number of other books and articles that sport the "Mirth" moniker. Justin Driver's June 11, 2001 *New Republic* article "Mirth of a nation: black comedy's reactionary hipness" viciously indicts the professional comical strategies of Chris Rock and Chris Tucker for drawing uncritically on minstrel tactics; Christie Davies's *The Mirth of Nations* analyses ethnic jokes (Jewish, Newfoundlander, Australian, Polish), pinpointing supposedly distinctive national humor characteristics while stressing their ambiguity; and Shaun de Waal and Barbara Ludman edited *Mirth of a Nation: 15 Years of Humour in the* Mail & Guardian, anthologizing a decade and half's worth of humorous material from a South African liberal broadsheet. All of these works implicitly and explicitly address humor and nationality as inextricably linked, while the South African anthology is yet another example of a *Mirth*-titled humor anthology.

[3] In " 'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision;" D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*," Michael Rogin cites Griffith's account of the film's inspiration:

> When his assistant Frank Woods brought him *The Clansman*, as Griffith told the story, he "skipped quickly through the book until I got to the part about the Klansmen, who according to no less than Woodrow Wilson, ran to the rescue of the downtrodden South after the Civil War. I could just see these Klansmen in a movie with their white robes flying.... We had had all sorts of

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> runs-to-the-rescue in pictures and horse operas.... Now I could see a chance to do this ride-to-the-rescue on a grand scale. Instead of saving one little Nell of the Plains, this ride would be to save a nation." (346)

[4] All three *Mirths*, it is interesting to note, invoke *Birth* only casually, asking readers to make a connection between the books and the film without actually looking into it. Michael Rogin has written about such tactics in the context of cold war politics in which the U.S. superpower practices a "political amnesia" that hides history in the open, concealing at the moment of revelation. In his essay, "'Make My Day!: Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics," Rogin works from Ronald Reagan's famous use of the Dirty Harry phrase to suggest how imperial politics promotes mass memory and mass amnesia to hide its imperial practices in the open. In the case of Reagan's repetition of the phrase "Make my day!", for instance, audiences are supposed to remember the phrase as a reference to Dirty Harry's manly disgust with urban street crime and his determined willingness to practice (and enjoy) violence against criminals. But what audiences are not supposed to remember is that Dirty Harry uses the phrase when a black man has a gun to the head of a white woman hostage. In the actual movie scene, what would make Dirty Harry's day is to watch a white woman be shot and to shoot a black man. Reagan's reference to the phrase, consciously or not, relies on audiences applying their memory to remember a link between a masculine resolution to protect the populace through violence and Reagan's defense of freedom and denying their memory to forget an equally available link between a secure white man taking pleasure in racist and sexist violence and Reagan's practice of imperial politics. As Rogin writes, "this content is hidden by the form that seems to reveal it.... In this motivated forgetting, that which is insistently represented becomes, by being normalized to invisibility, absent and disappeared" (503-04). While the connections between the *Mirths* and *Birth* are not political in the same way as Reagan-era covert operations and public speeches, nonetheless they seem to enact a kind of "political" amnesia so as to tell nationalistic narrative histories that require a process of remembering and forgetting intimately linked to the U.S. mass humor industry.

[5] By "American Humor Studies" I mean to identify a field of intellectual inquiry with a recognizable institutional foundation that includes an organization (the American Humor Studies Association), a journal (*Studies in American Humor*), and regular panels at conferences (the AHSA has two panels every year at the Modern Language Association annual conference). Thus, work that is produced out of these specific

instutional locations is work in "American Humor Studies." More broadly, work that is produced out of other locations but takes up the same questions and materials, and cites the most notable figures and studies, also counts as work in the field, even if, like this dissertation, that work seeks to resist the field and to speak directly to the broader field of American Studies.

[6] An 1883 publication, *Famous Funny Fellows: Brief Biographical Sketches of American Humorists* by Will M. Clemens also brings nationalist interests to bear on humor production in the nineteenth century.

[7] This hierarchy is underscored by the fact that as "Africans" and "darkies," black people are not even granted the status of nationality. It should be noted this kind of talk remains common practice in American Humor Studies. For instance, in the November 1, 2004 issue of "To Wit," the "Official Newsletter of the American Humor Studies Association," editor Kirby Olson's call for the study of all kinds of humor, like Cox's, condescendingly extends to include nonwhites: "And I have only touched upon the career of western humor. What use is humor to Australian aboriginals, to American Indians (with their impressive trickster tradition), to Africans, to Eskimoes, or to Cambodian Buddhists?" (5).

[8] Cox's passage draws on metaphors of bodily material and nation that recall a newspaper article Karl Marx wrote in 1842 on the subject of censorship in the press. Shlomo Avineri cites the passage, which he notes draws on Hegel's Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*:

> But philosophers do not grow like mushrooms, out of the earth; they are the outgrowth of their period, their nation, whose most subtle, delicate and invisible juices abound in the philosophical ideas. The same spirit that constructs the philosophical system in the mind of the philosopher builds the railways with the hands of the trade. Philosophy does not reside outside this world just as the mind does not reside outside man just because it is not located in his belly. (trans. and qtd. in Avineri 135)

And Shelley Streeby cites a passage from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (2 July 1859) that explicitly relates such fluids to racialized blood: "…the paper's writers even suggest that 'Spanish blood,' whether 'pure Castilian' or 'mixed with other races,' is a curse 'wherever it is the predominant fluid, if, indeed, such a filthy puddle can ever rise to the dignity of a liquid'" (35).

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[9] Carla L. Peterson notes that economic issues also played a role in the failure of Reconstruction, a role that casts the diamond/carbon distinction Cox makes between white and black humor practice in even clearer light:

> By the mid-1870s national Reconstruction efforts were already starting to unravel as state rights doctrines became increasingly prominent, a spirit of sectional compromise between North and South became more and more evident, and as Republican opinion moved closer toward Democratic conservatism; by the late 1870s the South could announce itself fully redeemed. If accusations of rampant corruption against politicians of the Grant era was one reason for the failure of black Reconstruction, its underlying causes must also be attributed to the economic instability of the period. The return of land to former plantation owners, the depression of the 1870s, the failure of the Freedmen's Savings Bank, the erosion of free labor ideology leading to increased tensions between capitalists and workers all had the effect of severely curtailing African Americans' search for economic autonomy; and these factors further exacerbated the still tense race relations between whites and blacks, resulting finally in the restoration of white supremacy in the South. (197)

[10] Two additional *Harper's* pieces on humor from the period, both of which raise issues of nationality in relation to humor, are "The Evolution of Humor" (May 1890) by Professor S.H. Butcher, L.L.D., and "The Penalty of Humor" (May 1896) by Brander Matthews. Both do similar work to that of Cox, Lukens, Corbin and Ker, assuming that humor practice is linked to identity and that humor practice must be subject to classification.

[11] Janice A. Radway's "What's in a Name?" Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," addresses the difficulties associated with naming an academic field or institution "American," detailing the troubling history of such naming and pinpointing the unavoidable baggage of such terminology. Ultimately, Radway suggests changing the name rather than working to rearticulate its imperial connotations. Amy Kaplan, in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, puts forward a similar, though implicit rather than explicit, critique of such naming by collapsing previously cherished distinctions between America, anarchy, domesticity, and empire. For instance, in her chapter "The Imperial Routes of Mark Twain," Kaplan suggests "that the national identity of Mark Twain, his

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'Americanness,' was forged in an international context of imperial expansion" (52). Here, imperial expansion converts ("forges") humor practice (Twain's writing) and humorous character (Twain's persona) into a nationalist identity. Like traditional AHS scholars, Kaplan writes a history that assumes a connection between "America" and humor practice, but unlike those scholars Kaplan pressures the form that converts humor practice into national identity, setting that form in relief, rather than assuming that form as an apolitical intellectual reality about humor.

[12] In the bitter, self-indulgent afterword to the 1981 edition, Bier complains about "canned laughter" on television programs, noting "in this retarded phase of seriated TV humor and live-action cartoons (there is not a single variety hour on TV anymore), isn't it also to the point that adaptations of comic movies bear the same stamp of trivialized slapstick and infantile reduction?" (481). Christie Davies, in his 2002 study *The Mirth of Nations*, cites among prominent AHS scholars only Bier, and characterizes his scholarship as "vacuous."

[13] Attesting to the durability of traditional AHS theories and procedures, in 1984 William Bedford Clark and W. Craig Turner published the edited volume, *Critical Essays on American Humor*. Ominously dedicated "to Charlene and Annette, who know when to laugh," this volume reprints a number of influential essays for the field from the nineteenth-century and later, including a portion of the Cox essay I cite above. Despite its meek effort to see into the future with the inclusion of Hill's essay "The Future of American Humor: Through a Glass Eye, Darkly," the book is a testament to the past, especially in its familiar rhetorical style which at times seems bizarrely similar to the fluidic nationalist rhetoric of Cox and his gilded age counterparts. Clark and Turner write in their introduction: "Even in the United States, a nation in which the lachrymose and ludicrous have gone hand-in-hand from the beginning, we feel an undeniable compulsion to excuse ourselves for laughing" (1); while Hill writes of "America" in the 1980s, "perhaps we are dancing before the battle of Waterloo; but, predictably, we *are* dancing. Perhaps we are laughing less at ourselves than we once did (an insight that foreigners to American culture frequently assert), but we are laughing. However 'sick' and fatalistic we may be, the funny bone is still functioning – and may well be the only salvation for us all" (225). Like Cox in his 1875 article, these writers take links between the nation and humor practice as given, and, like Cox, they punctuate their writing with bodily clichés and smug references to "we" and "us."

Clark and Turner's introduction is important for the history I am trying to tell because the essay provides its own history of the field. After placing American humor in a familiar context of "puritan" and other theories critiqued by Reising, they write that "the question of when and how American humor became distinctly American might be a point of contention" and that "the vast majority of those who have written about American humor agrees on one point: it is at once an outgrowth of and an index to the collective American mind" (3). Then, perhaps applying Bier's comment about the production of humor and times of national industry to scholarship, they add: "it is hardly surprising, then, that periods of particularly intense interest in American humor as a subject for serious comment have coincided with periods in our cultural and political history when defining the nature or the American character and the meaning of the American experience has been a matter of paramount importance" (3). Inadvertently, this history pinpoints with precision the nationalist interests that making humor American serves, reinforcing the observation that scholarly practice is not exceptional to nationalism but instead partially constitutive of it. Perhaps it is their reverent faith in nationalist scholarship that prompts Clark and Turner to praise *America's Humor* for its range. Just as oddly, despite citing some criticism from James M. Cox that objects to the book's "lack of theoretical emphasis," the two editors state that "*America's Humor* clearly represents a watershed in the history of writing about American humor. A synthesis and extension of the best work done on the subject in the past, it establishes the direction future explorations are likely to take" (13).

[14] Three recent AHS book-length studies continue this methodological tradition – writing lists and asserting the existence of distinct characteristics relating to humor practice -- even if their nationalist assumptions are toned down somewhat from those of Sloane and Blair. Gregg Camfield's 1997 *Necessary Madness; The Humor of Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* abandons a specifically nationalist essentialism for the "scientific" essentialism of "neural Darwinism," speculating that humor, which is as "genial and creative" as it is violent and destructive (iii), strengthens the brain by creating multiple neural pathways, rendering it more likely to be selected for in the event of an evolutionary crisis of survival. Presumably, nineteenth-century American domestic humor (which, Camfield argues, crossed gender boundaries) would have helped nineteenth-century Americans survive in a different biological way than non-Americans. See "The Evolution of Humor" by Professor S.H. Butcher, LL. D., from the May 1890 *Harper's*, for an earlier AHS effort to link evolutionary theory to humor practice, especially since Butcher

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also discusses the lack of evolutionary theory pertaining to "non-malignant" humor. Bruce Michelson's 2000 *Literary Wit* eschews an explicit nationalism only to list six specific ways that literary wit (which is distinct from other kinds of wit) ought to be studied. Like Camfield, Michelson is uncomfortable with buzz words like "hegemony" but perfectly comfortable with phrases like "paradigm-shifting" and Cox-like formulations such as "out of disembodied voices we create wisdom; for good or ill, that is a philosophical and theological practice of the West" (59). Like Camfield, Michelson desires simultaneously to break from and revere AHS traditions, but his effort to write a foundational book that will grasp "all" literary wit instead repeats core AHS classificatory practices. Judith Lee's 2000 *Defining New Yorker Humor*, a densely printed 362-page tome, which like Lukens's piece is "documentary and rhetorical in method" (14), strives only to "define" *New Yorker* humor in its first five years of operation. Lee asks "one central question: How does a magazine construct and communicate – that is, define – its distinctive personality?" (10) Perhaps the most sober explanation for how unusable many AHS practices and traditions are can be found in Ian Gordon's review of *Defining* New Yorker *Humor*:

> There are some…. odd moments in the book. For instance, Lee depicts *New Yorker* layouts, which had illustrations bleeding into text columns, as bold innovations. Likewise, she finds the stepped layout of an Otto Soglow sequential panel story across a page of text an application of modernist principles, and she associates it with Einsteinian notions of time and space. Given that [*New Yorker* editor] Ross in the early 1920s was an editor of *Judge*, an illustrated humor magazine, and that Lee cites this editorship among her proofs of his professional capacity, she should be aware that *Judge* and two other humor magazines, *Life* and *Puck*, made frequent use of such layout styles from the 1880s onwards. (1127-28)

Here, the thickets Lee foregrounds become as opaque as the forests she backgrounds. Eschewing theory for a "documentary" and "rhetorical" methodology ends here in a predictable disaster familiar because it repeats the disaster of *America's Humor*, which also eschewed theory – feminist theory – for a "documentary" and "rhetorical" masculinist historicism.

[15] An alternate site to explore the relative impact of the field is work less devoted to literature than to broad studies of the "American mind" or "character." Even here, however, a quick survey obtains familiar results. For instance, Henry Steele Commager's 1950 *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American*

Thought and Character Since the 1880s spends some time noting the significance of American humor to the national mind/character, mentioning Rourke's book but not Blair's. That said, Commager is clearly familiar with the key *doxa* of AHS, that is, the unquestioned connection between humor practice and national character. Commager, too, sounds at times like Cox, for instance when he writes "the hothouse character of American humor reflected a growing artificiality in American life," and at times like a committed AHS scholar, writing that no change in the American character between the nineteenth and twentieth century "perhaps, was more striking than the change in the character of American humor" (418-19).

[16] In identifying a defining AHS theory (that links humor practice to national identity) and a defining AHS methodology (that converts representations of humor practice into the hierarchically constituted elements of that identity), I heuristically take on a discourse of origin and influence to stress the institutional history of the discipline that might account for the accident of the irths. And, in flirting with my own hierarchized distinction between the old and the new (privileging the latter), I take on a discourse of progress to critique the history of the discipline's political commitments. Skirting the edge of what Stuart Hall has called "the tyranny of the new" and of plain hypocrisy, I threaten to practice the functioning contradictions I condemn. But wrestling with this field's history necessarily entails risk and requires a thorough and negative critique, especially since this field remains so invested in making humor American that it repeatedly cites *The Birth of a Nation* as a durable joke rather than a durable disaster.

[17] This loss of the past, it should be noted, is only impending, and in no way complete. This is for two reasons: first, that AHS obsessively reinscribes this narrative; and second, because important and powerful figures at the National Endowment for the Humanities, at least in 2004, are presumably supportive of scholarly work like that of traditional AHS nationalism. See Mary Jacoby's article in *Salon* from Aug. 26, 2004, "Madame Cheney's Cultural Revolution: How the vice president's powerful wife makes sure that historians and other scholars follow the right path," for a disturbing look at the influence of conservative politics on scholarship in the early twenty first century U.S.

[18] Walter Blair writes that the *History* "went through eight editions during the first year, and after the plates were sold as late as 1905 to Thompson and Thomas, the company, according to one of the partners, sold

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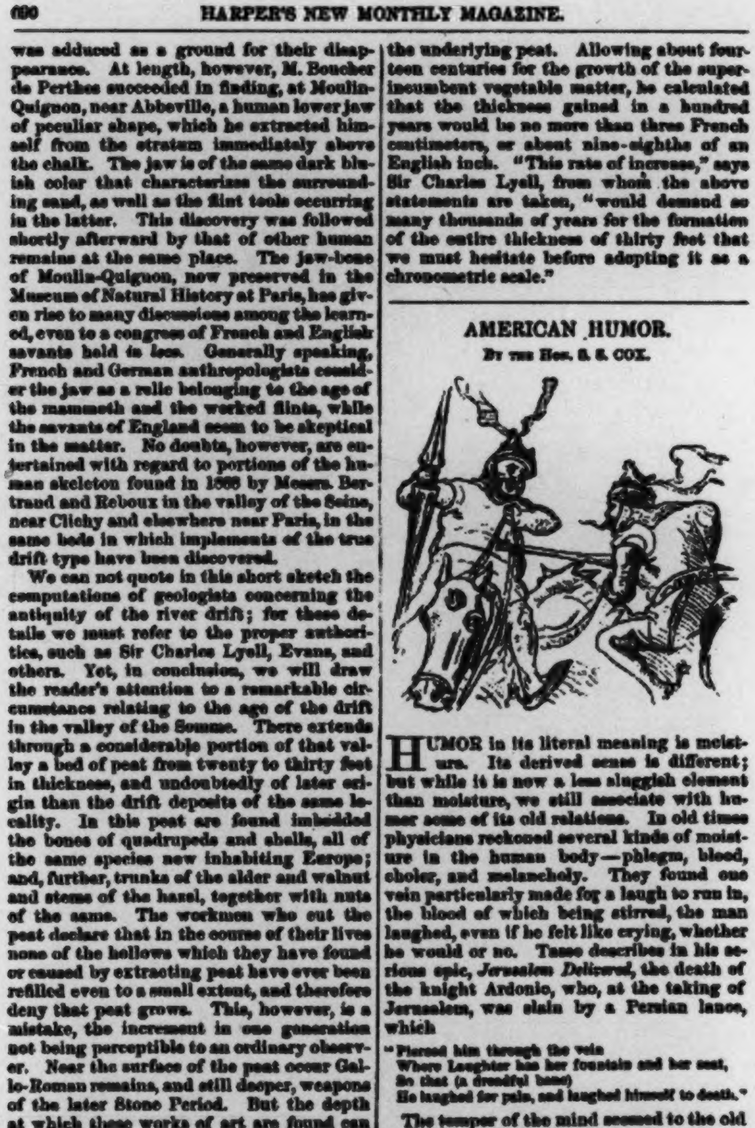
250,000 copies in thirteen years. Nye's son estimates that at least 500,000 copies of the history were sold" (*Essays on American Humor* 38).

Chapter One – Figure One



690 HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

was adduced as a ground for their disappearance. At length, however, M. Boucher de Perthes succeeded in finding, at Moulin-Quignon, near Abbeville, a human lower jaw of peculiar shape, which he extracted himself from the stratum immediately above the chalk. The jaw is of the same dark bluish color that characterizes the surrounding sand, as well as the flint tools occurring in the latter. This discovery was followed shortly afterward by that of other human remains at the same place. The jaw-bone of Moulin-Quignon, now preserved in the Museum of Natural History at Paris, has given rise to many discussions among the learned, even to a congress of French and English savants held *in loco*. Generally speaking, French and German anthropologists consider the jaw as a relic belonging to the age of the mammoth and the worked flints, while the savants of England seem to be skeptical in the matter. No doubts, however, are entertained with regard to portions of the human skeleton found in 1868 by Messrs. Bertrand and Reboux in the valley of the Seine, near Clichy and elsewhere near Paris, in the same beds in which implements of the true drift type have been discovered.

We can not quote in this short sketch the computations of geologists concerning the antiquity of the river drift; for these details we must refer to the proper authorities, such as Sir Charles Lyell, Evans, and others. Yet, in conclusion, we will draw the reader's attention to a remarkable circumstance relating to the age of the drift in the valley of the Somme. There extends through a considerable portion of that valley a bed of peat from twenty to thirty feet in thickness, and undoubtedly of later origin than the drift deposits of the same locality. In this peat are found imbedded the bones of quadrupeds and shells, all of the same species now inhabiting Europe; and, further, trunks of the alder and walnut and stems of the hazel, together with nuts of the same. The workmen who cut the peat declare that in the course of their lives none of the hollows which they have found or caused by extracting peat have ever been refilled even to a small extent, and therefore deny that peat grows. This, however, is a mistake, the increment in one generation not being perceptible to an ordinary observer. Near the surface of the peat occur Gallo-Roman remains, and still deeper, weapons of the later Stone Period. But the depth at which these works of art are found can not be considered as a sure test of age, the peat being often so fluid that heavy substances may sink through it by their own weight. In one instance, however, Boucher de Perthes observed several large flat dishes of Roman pottery lying in a horizontal position in the peat, the shape of which must have prevented them from sinking through the underlying peat. Allowing about fourteen centuries for the growth of the superincumbent vegetable matter, he calculated that the thickness gained in a hundred years would be no more than three French centimeters, or about nine-eighths of an English inch. "This rate of increase," says Sir Charles Lyell, from whom the above statements are taken, "would demand so many thousands of years for the formation of the entire thickness of thirty feet that we must hesitate before adopting it as a chronometric scale."

AMERICAN HUMOR.

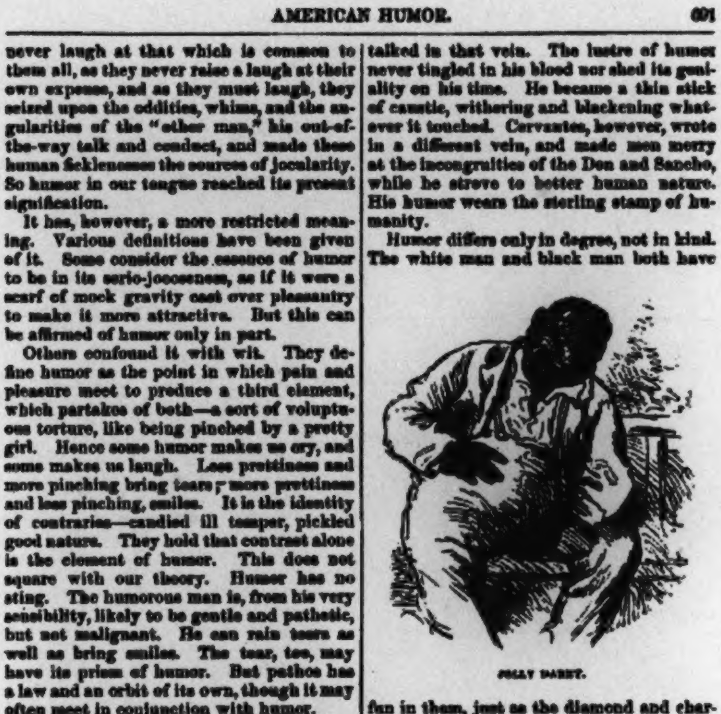
By the Hon. S. S. Cox.

HUMOR in its literal meaning is moisture. Its derived sense is different; but while it is now a less sluggish element than moisture, we still associate with humor some of its old relations. In old times physicians reckoned several kinds of moisture in the human body—phlegm, blood, choler, and melancholy. They found one vein particularly made for a laugh to run in, the blood of which being stirred, the man laughed, even if he felt like crying, whether he would or no. Tasso describes in his serious epic, *Jerusalem Delivered*, the death of the knight Ardonio, who, at the taking of Jerusalem, was slain by a Persian lance, which

"Pierced him through the vein
Where Laughter has her fountain and her seat,
So that (a dreadful bane)
He laughed for pain, and laughed himself to death."

The temper of the mind seemed to the old doctors to change as one or the other of these kinds of moisture predominated. Thus the mind received its prevailing tone. As the current of moisture changed from time to time, humor began to mean the *present* disposition of the man. His characteristic peculiarities seemed to depend on these mercurial influences of the body; and as men

Chapter One – Figure Two



never laugh at that which is common to them all, as they never raise a laugh at their own expense, and as they must laugh, they seized upon the oddities, whims, and the angularities of the "other man," his out-of-the-way talk and conduct, and made these human ficklenesses the sources of jocularity. So humor in our tongue reached its present signification.

It has, however, a more restricted meaning. Various definitions have been given of it. Some consider the essence of humor to be in its serio-jocoseness, as if it were a scarf of mock gravity cast over pleasantry to make it more attractive. But this can be affirmed of humor only in part.

Others confound it with wit. They define humor as the point in which pain and pleasure meet to produce a third element, which partakes of both—a sort of voluptuous torture, like being pinched by a pretty girl. Hence some humor makes us cry, and some makes us laugh. Less prettiness and more pinching bring tears; more prettiness and less pinching, smiles. It is the identity of contraries—candied ill temper, pickled good nature. They hold that contrast alone is the element of humor. This does not square with our theory. Humor has no sting. The humorous man is, from his very sensibility, likely to be gentle and pathetic, but not malignant. He can rain tears as well as bring smiles. The tear, too, may have its prism of humor. But pathos has a law and an orbit of its own, though it may often meet in conjunction with humor.

Hobbes attributed all laughter to a sense of exulting superiority, and even pleasure in the pain of another. That sort of laughter may do for fiends, not for men. Men laugh at wit as well as at humor. So they do at farce. There is much of humor in both wit and farce. They are divided from humor by no very clear lines; yet humor is neither wit nor farce. Wit cuts, humor tickles; farce grins, humor smiles. Wit is polished and sharp, an edge-tool dangerous to handle in the most practiced hands. Humor may be rusty, though never dull. While wit uses the scalpel, brings blood, divides our members, cuts out the gangrene, and oftentimes the healthy parts, humor manipulates gently, or gestures with the playful finger under the ribs of jollity, never drawing blood, but pumping up the moisture until the eyes run over with gladness. Farce, on the other hand, is the caricature of humor. It shakes one rather roughly, disturbs the gentler currents, until they lose their lucid mirthfulness in the muddy rush of broad guffaw.

Wit is not always a desirable quality. The worst men often use it. The devil generally monopolizes it. John Randolph had it and used it. Voltaire, that embodied epigram, curt and unconscionable, wrote and talked in that vein. The lustre of humor never tingled in his blood nor shed its geniality on his time. He became a thin stick of caustic, withering and blackening whatever it touched. Cervantes, however, wrote in a different vein, and made men merry at the incongruities of the Don and Sancho, while he strove to better human nature. His humor wears the sterling stamp of humanity.

Humor differs only in degree, not in kind. The white man and black man both have fun in them, just as the diamond and charcoal are of the same material—carbon. In one it is crystallised and concentrated; in the other it is diffusive and combustible. Try each under the blow-pipe: the charcoal will glow with plentiful scintillations long before the diamond releases a sparkle of its light.

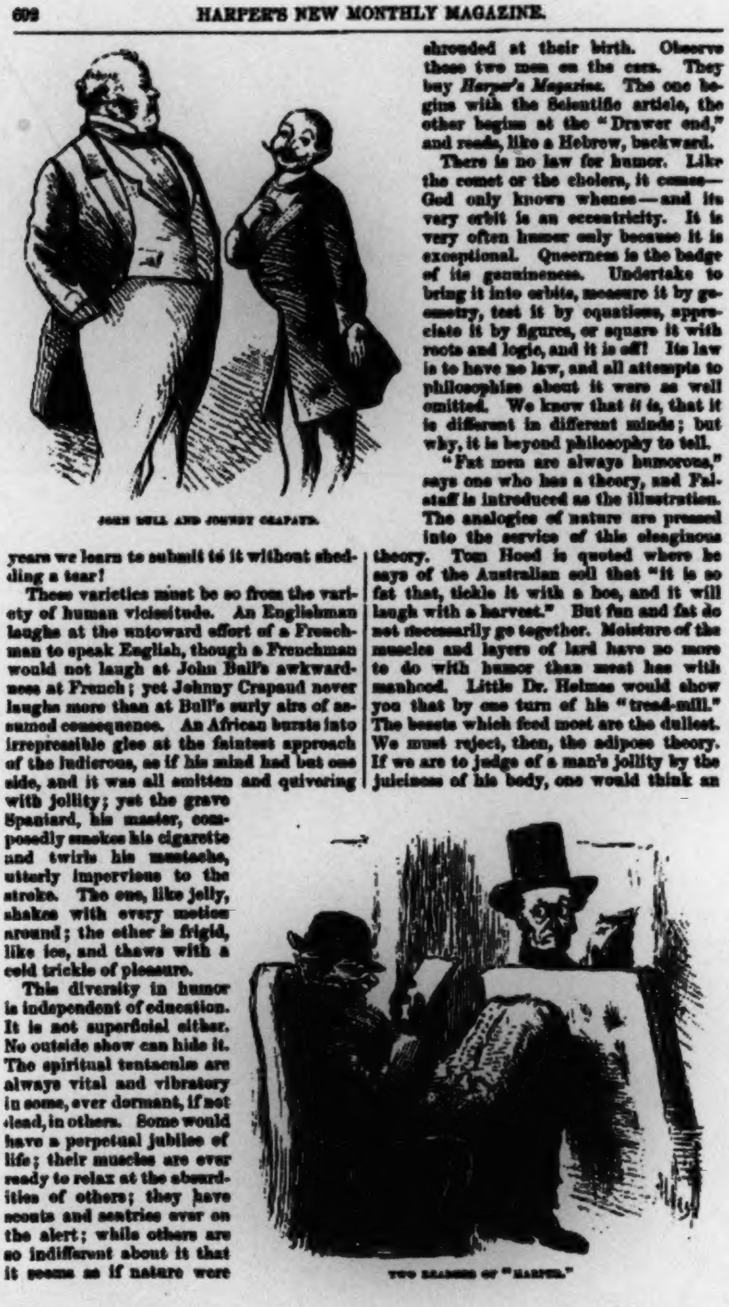
JOLLY DARKY.

There are some phases in life which would stir humor in every man of sanity. Not that every one would laugh at the same object, but every one would laugh at some time of his life at some object. What would be a homoeopathic pellet of humor to one would furnish another with a ton of fun, and *vice versa*.

Again, the humor of men differs at different hours of the day and at different epochs of their lives. Men are like some flowers. The common pink is blue early in the morning, and bright pink as the sun advances. Others are white in the morning, pink at noon, and red at sunset, as if they took their hues from the sun in his motions.

Moreover, what is amusing to a boy is puerile to a man, and what is painful to a boy may be pleasant to a man. Who does not remember that nothing was so dreaded by him at school as to be punished by sitting between two girls? But ah! the force of habit and the lapse of time! In after-

Chapter One – Figure Three



JOHN BULL AND JOHNNY CRAPAUD.

years we learn to submit to it without shedding a tear!

These varieties must be so from the variety of human vicissitude. An Englishman laughs at the untoward effort of a Frenchman to speak English, though a Frenchman would not laugh at John Bull's awkwardness at French; yet Johnny Crapaud never laughs more than at Bull's surly airs of assumed consequence. An African bursts into irrepressible glee at the faintest approach of the ludicrous, as if his mind had but one side, and it was all smitten and quivering with jollity; yet the grave Spaniard, his master, composedly smokes his cigarette and twirls his mustache, utterly impervious to the stroke. The one, like jelly, shakes with every motion around; the other is frigid, like ice, and thaws with a cold trickle of pleasure.

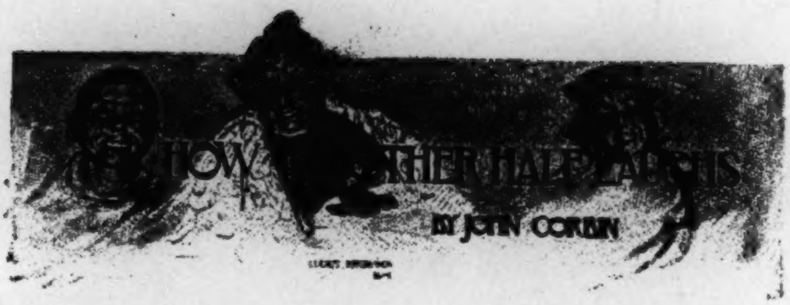
This diversity in humor is independent of education. It is not superficial either. No outside show can hide it. The spiritual tentaculæ are always vital and vibratory in some, ever dormant, if not dead, in others. Some would have a perpetual jubilee of life; their muscles are ever ready to relax at the absurdities of others; they have scouts and sentries ever on the alert; while others are so indifferent about it that it seems as if nature were shrouded at their birth. Observe those two men on the cars. They buy *Harper's Magazine*. The one begins with the Scientific article, the other begins at the "Drawer end," and reads, like a Hebrew, backward.

There is no law for humor. Like the comet or the cholera, it comes—God only knows whence—and its very orbit is an eccentricity. It is very often humor only because it is exceptional. Queerness is the badge of its genuineness. Undertake to bring it into orbits, measure it by geometry, test it by equations, appreciate it by figures, or square it with roots and logic, and it is off! Its law is to have no law, and all attempts to philosophise about it were as well omitted. We know that *it is*, that it is different in different minds; but why, it is beyond philosophy to tell.

"Fat men are always humorous," says one who has a theory, and Falstaff is introduced as the illustration. The analogies of nature are pressed into the service of this oleaginous theory. Tom Hood is quoted where he says of the Australian soil that "it is so fat that, tickle it with a hoe, and it will laugh with a harvest." But fun and fat do not necessarily go together. Moisture of the muscles and layers of lard have no more to do with humor than meat has with manhood. Little Dr. Holmes would show you that by one turn of his "tread-mill." The beasts which feed most are the dullest. We must reject, then, the adipose theory. If we are to judge of a man's jollity by the juiciness of his body, one would think an

TWO READERS OF "HARPER."

Chapter One – Figure Four


HOW THE OTHER HALF LAUGHS
BY JOHN CORBIN

THE East Side is scarcely the place in which one would look to find much heed paid to the shows and the gayeties of life. We have heard of the terrors of the tenements, and of sweat-shops where workman and sweater alike risk body and soul for a few pieces of silver, whole families sewing day and night amid squalor and disease; but the reports of organized charity have neglected to remind us that the people who support the theatres of the Bowery get as much fun of their sort out of life as most of us. You may pity the people of the East Side, if you must, ten hours a day, but when the arc-lights gleam beneath the tracks of the elevated, if you are honest you will envy them.

To any one who cares for the stage and for the art of the player in America, the theatres of the lower Bowery are of special interest. Once the haunt of Mose, the Bowery boy, and Lise, his "steady," they are now the homes of foreign actors, who will give you a good time in almost any language. And whereas our plays in English are apt to be either imported or stupid, and are often both, many of these foreign plays are written in New York, and—sure sign of a genuine artistic impulse—they treat the life and the history of the people who swarm to see them. They are crude and often absurd enough, but when the curtain rings down, a candid observer will admit that the artistic spirit is more vital and spontaneous in them than in the plays of the most prosperous uptown theatres.

The Americans who are familiar with the Teatro Italiano might almost be counted on one's fingers. The theatre is closed now, and the company is disbanded; but for those who knew it, it has a curious and very intimate interest that still keeps its memory warm. This was due in the first place, I think, to the Italians we met. They were bootblacks, and banana-venders, East-Side barbers, and ex-members of Colonel Waring's Street-cleaning Brigade. In some theatres the people you sit next are reserved, and conscious of distinctions, but these men were more truly in sympathy with life. They would speak to you on the slightest pretext, or on none, and would relate all that was happening on the stage, which was useful of them, for the plays were for the most part in popular dialect. The only visitor I ever knew to be neglected was a lady who carried a bottle of smelling-salts. The reproach of this was scarcely obvious, but it was not as the Romans do. In the end we came to think very well of the Italian plays and actors; and if we thought unduly well of them it must have been because, in some unconscious fashion, our neighbors imparted a measure of the grace and ease with which they succeeded in having a good time.

They were for the most part men. If this fact had any special significance I was never quite sure what it was; yet it is certain that the arts in their more primitive stages have always been masculine, and one can find fair warrant for saying that when women have come in for a share, they have lost primal force. It is also true, no doubt, that in Italian communities women are apt to be mothers at an early age: babies are sad impediments to many kinds of gayeties and shows. Yet there was always a sprink-

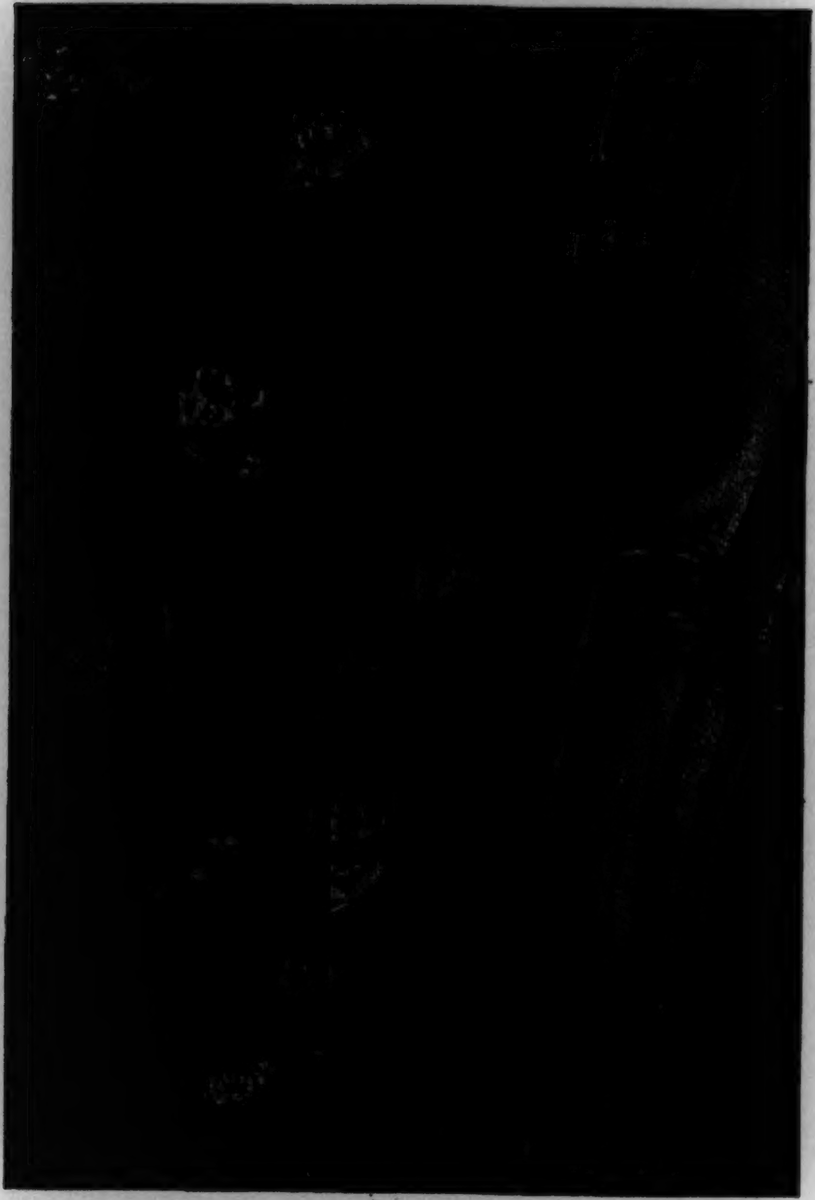
Chapter One – Figure Five

A YIDDISH ADAPTATION.

There is no end of plays and operas drawn from Josephus and the Old Testament, plays which bear the same relation to Jewish national life that the Chronicle histories of the Elizabethan stage bore to the life of England. Such plays are often produced on appropriate feast-days, celebrations of which are to be witnessed in this odd corner of New York in precisely the form in vogue since hundreds of years before the Christian era. One of the most popular themes is afforded by the persecutions of the Yiddish peoples in their homes across the sea. There are struggles between labor and capital, with strikes and riots enough; and there are Nihilists who are dynamiters, and suffer for it. But with all this there is a strong infusion of the life of the Bowery. The first time I made inquiries at the theatre I found that the historical opera of *Bar Kochba* was to be given, and that on the following night there was to be "a play by one of the managers' wives, called *Annie the Finisher.*" It was "about a girl here in New York what finishes." A *finisher* is the technical name for the sweat-shop woman who "finishes" or puts the last touches on the garments they call "pants," which they make and finish at four or five dollars a week. Annie, I found, was an operative with whom the son of her employer fell in love. There is much in the play about poor Yids and rich Yids, about love and plutocracy. After the usual course of true love the young people are happily married. The play is very popular.

In a melodrama called *The Aristocracy of a Province*, a humble serving-man in Bessarabia is bequeathed a fortune of two million dollars by a relative who had become rich in America. His landlord—the provincial aristocrat—finds this out, steals the vital documents, comes to America, impersonates his old servant, and enjoys his stolen millions. The action takes place in New York, where the thief is marrying his son to the daughter of a Broadway merchant, while the true heir lives in poverty as an East Side coal-man. On the one hand is shown the life of the struggling Yiddish people—tenement life, street life, the brutality of the New York police; while on the other is shown the life of a prosperous resident of Fifth Avenue. The leading juvenile is the son of the merchant, and a student in Columbia University. When he makes his first entrance, the friends of the fam-

Chapter One – Figure Six



"THE AUDIENCES SHOUT AND WHISTLE THEIR APPRECIATION."

Chapter Two: The Traffic in Stereotypes

> My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation…. but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting.
>
> -Edward Said

Questions of Currency

In the controversial 2001 film *Bamboozled*, director Spike Lee stages a grim reckoning of U.S. mass culture's ongoing commitment to representational violence performed in the interests of whiteness. Set in the near future, the film's narrative posits a not-so-fantastic national television network digging up disgusting entertainment industry history to draw huge audiences and thus reap substantial advertising revenue. Taking a disgruntled executive's joke seriously, the network decides to restage, in the new millennium, blackface minstrelsy, one of the first forms of U.S. mass culture and one of the most popular nineteenth-century humor industry genres. Rather than falling flat because of its dated humor, the new millennium minstrel show is a huge success precisely because nineteenth-century blackface minstrel humor stereotypes still inform U.S. mass culture. The film thus stages two key arguments: that nineteenth-century minstrel stereotypes remain a durable part of U.S. mass culture, and that minstrelsy performs representational violence through humorous stereotypes that misrepresent African Americans as buffoons whose natural desire is to clown to please their white masters (the film begins with Stevie Wonder's song "Misrepresented People" playing in the background). These arguments attend to material instances of practicing and maintaining misrepresentation, which include minstrel objects in the form of toys and decorations, and minstrel stage materials like burnt cork that actors apply to their faces to perform minstrelsy's version of blackness. Lee's arguments about stereotypes are perhaps most succinctly captured by shots of old toy banks that, shaped like grotesque minstrel characters, symbolize the relationship between racism, coins, the humor industry, and the durable, material life of stereotypes: these banks embody a false image of African-American facial characteristics and a real relation between money and minstrelsy, suggesting how the minstrel stereotype continues to be a sound investment for a U.S. mass culture grounded in a politics of white supremacy.

Lee's engagement with misrepresentation picks up on the most familiar understanding of the stereotype. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the term has implied "something continued or constantly repeated without change," fixed and perpetuated "in an unchanging form"; since the 1920s it has designated "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person" or type of person (OED). The term has also been applied, in a perhaps more aesthetic sense, to cheap artistic rendering; Margaret Fuller draws (or perhaps even coins) this sense in "American Literature" when she writes of James Russell Lowell's contribution, "but his verse is stereotype; his thought sounds no depth, and posterity will not remember him" (Fuller 1659). Fuller's engagement with the concept captures in an early form a contradiction in talk about stereotyping: stereotyping, the print process that is intended to ensure cheaper and more accurate reproduction in future years, and the discursive practice that relies on repetition, are both supposed to ensure a short life for writing. The stereotype here is a cheap, accurate repetition of an inaccurate representation (or in Fuller's sense, style of writing) whose manifest durability is a perversion of what ought to be, whose questionable survival is supposedly not a function of intrinsic mimetic or artistic value but of political interests, interests like those of white supremacy.[1]

Through his observations that the language of power is "a language of repetition" and that "all official institutions of language are repeating machines," Roland Barthes ultimately asserts that the "stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of ideology" (40). The force of Barthes' claim is clear, and his sense of how ideology functions is intended to resonate through all that follows in this chapter. But though Barthes recognizes the institutional machinery that lies behind the stereotype, he does not stress the full material implications of this observation. For him, the stereotype represses "bliss" through bare, iron repetition, and thus "the bastard form of mass culture is humiliated repetition: content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions – these are repeated, but the superficial forms are varied: always new books, new programs, new films, news items, but always the same meaning" (41-42). For Barthes, the material dimension (captured in the sense of "newness") only serves to hide the truth, which is that "the stereotype is the word repeated without any magic, any enthusiasm, as though it were natural" (42). Here, Barthes' sense of the discursive stereotype might be seen to dovetail nicely, if ironically, with the print stereotype, which is itself text repeated without the hands of typesetters, appearing to be printed from natural set pages when in fact their newness is a lie – they are reproduced from plates that may have been collecting dust in a storage facility for years. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly for my claims here, Barthes wrongly articulates the material dimension of the stereotype to its lying newness, as if all of those books and films are really the same thing and the medium in which they are presented, the purposes for which they are published, the means by which they are distributed, are without significance. My claims in this chapter, and especially in the case study which concludes it, are that these material forms of production cannot simply be passed over or reduced into one form, *especially* if the stereotype is indeed "the major figure of ideology."

Barthes also implies that stereotyped representations are lies, something to be "distrusted" (43). Critiques of the stereotype that assert the violence of misrepresentation, though still common, have been significantly challenged by scholars who work to shift the debate from evaluations of relative representational accuracy to theorizations of representation itself. Edward Said's important work in *Orientalism*, for instance, which I cite in the epigraph to this chapter, engages stereotypes not as "misrepresentations" but simply as representations which operate "for a purpose" and "according to a tendency" (281). Homi Bhabha, through his influential theory of ambivalence, also refuses to engage misrepresentation as the stereotype's means-to-violence. Instead, Bhabha theorizes the stereotype's value to colonial discourse in terms of ambivalence: stereotypes are useful for colonial discourse, in fact they are colonial discourse's "major discursive strategy" (66), because they express opposing positions (for instance, that African-Americans are inherently pleasant and lazy and humorous at the same time as they are inherently violent) that render the stereotype a slippery discourse difficult to combat. This ambivalence thus grants the stereotype a historical elasticity, ensuring the stereotype's "repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures" (66). Such ambivalence, however, also produces a kind of "liberatory 'excess'" in which objects of derision are also objects of desire, so that stereotypes (which constantly require repetition) enable "a transgression… from the space of…. otherness" (67) in addition to reinforcing colonialist ideology. On the strength of his theory of productive ambivalence, Bhabha predicts that stereotypes will someday undo themselves when the production of excess finally overtakes their power as tools of colonial discourse. Bhabha's theory of ambivalence has had a profound impact on critical accounts of minstrelsy, such as those of Eric Lott and W.T. Lhamon, that also work to shift the terms of debate away from issues of accuracy to track (respectively) the cultural work of minstrelsy in the socializing of white working class men in the 1830s and the cultural legacy of a blackface lore cycle that was not inherently racist but instead "deformed" (Lhamon 215) by racism.

Although all of these theories rely to some extent on the material dimension of the discursive stereotype towards which Lee gestures (Bhabha perhaps least so), I want to shift the terms of debate more firmly in the direction of the material to nuance the stereotype's history as a "major discursive strategy" and to track its presence in the humor industry. My point of intervention will be to restore into our view of the discursive stereotype the print process known as "stereotyping" that revolutionized mass printing in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Such a restoration will permit me to stress the important sense in which the discursive stereotype draws its force from a reference to a print practice caught up in its own relation to mass culture, and to theorize the sense in which discursive stereotypes have a constitutive material dimension .

In a stereotype printing process, a permanent block of text is fashioned out of a temporary setting of type, freeing up type for further settings and leaving printers with permanent sets that facilitate quick and efficient reprinting processes. Indeed, it was the quick switch to stereotyping (and later electrotyping) that allowed the famed Harper Brothers publishing house to become, by the 1840s, the largest printing house in the United States and a significant presence in the global print market. As Eugene Exman writes, "in fact, their early success was partly due to the fact that they were the very first book publishers to adopt stereotyping as a regular procedure. While the cost of these plates was a sizable expense, plates could easily be stored and the distributed type put immediately to further use" (10). Stereotyping allowed the house, which already made its profit from pirated copies of foreign books, the opportunity to copy these copies more efficiently and with greater precision, setting a dramatic industrial precedent for the impact in the nineteenth-century of machines for mass print reproduction. Lee's, and even Fuller's, sense of stereotyping owes a debt to early uses of the term that drew on the stereotype printing process to explain through metaphor the purpose and effect of a certain kind of representation. How might our sense of the stereotype as the major figure of ideology, as an ambivalent discursive strategy for securing hegemony, be nuanced by an appreciation of this material history that firmly links the stereotype to the development of the modern print industry and the emergence of mass culture in the nineteenth century? How might our sense of the relations between humor and the stereotype in what Said calls an "economic setting" shift when we restore the sense of the material process to reckon its commercial trafficking?

Thomas Augst's effort (cited in the first chapter) to restore a material history to the concept of character shows how a restoration of material history might impact current understandings of the stereotype. In Augst's account, concepts of individual character (which I extend to the national character) are understood in relation to the material printing practice of imprinting. Augst notes that Locke and Franklin's use of printing metaphors was perhaps a response to changing conditions that required new figurative expressions: "Like Locke's metaphor of the tabula rasa, Franklin's metaphor [of errata] suggests that we understand character in normative terms, as a master text we seek to reproduce in our own lives, and against which we correct our errors and revise our habits. Like Locke's image of characters on paper, it also suggests how the modern psychology of introspection required a more discursive medium than the wax tablet Aristotle first used as an emblem for the imprinting of information on the human mind" (25). Taking this history into account, the elaboration, from the stereotype printing process, of a metaphor for describing "unchanging forms" and, even more appropriately, "preconceived and oversimplified ideas of the characteristics which typify a person," needs to be understood as a deeply sedimented way of accounting for changing modes of expression and changing notions of human psychology. The important distinction to be made, however, between Locke and Franklin's sense of character and, say, Fuller's sense of the stereotype, is that the notion of "character" is granted a kind of honorific distinction by its articulation to a printing process in the eighteenth century that was heralded as instrumental in fostering the revolution, while the notion of "stereotype" is invested with a deep criticism by virtue of its articulation to a mass printing process from the nineteenth century that was derided as heralding the downfall of literary, artistic, and ethical standards of character.

Another example of how a recollection of the materiality of stereotyping might shift our understanding of the stereotype as a concept can be seen if we apply the material sense to what Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, calls "the economy of stereotype." Morrison identifies this economy as a "common linguistic strategy employed in fiction to engage the serious consequences of blacks" for American literature and culture; specifically, this economy "allows the writer a quick and easy image without the responsibility of specificity, accuracy, or even narratively useful description" (67). For Morrison, "economy" is meant to resonate in terms of artistic writing practice; that is, stereotypes are said to be economical because they are thrifty literary ways of describing character or type that appeal to certain kinds of writers, and not because they are good ways of making money (though presumably Morrison would welcome this extension of her definition). But if we restore the material sense of the stereotype printing process to the economy of stereotype, other intriguing and revealing senses of the term become available. For instance, the stereotype printing process is also a thrifty, "economical" way of producing text that might be described as a "quick and easy" and profitable means for writers and publishers to print texts. In the material sense of reproduction, however, the "economy of the stereotype plate" resonates differently from Morrison's economy insofar as a stereotyped print reproduction is a very responsible way to produce texts "accurately" (the plate remains in storage and is less likely to become corrupted, or changed from its original, in the way a reset text might). Such difference, however, only impacts Morrison's sense of economical stereotyped representations insofar as that accuracy, that instantly recognizable and durable reproduction of traits, remains "quick and easy" because of material conditions similar to those that keep the stereotype plate in good order; that is, stereotype plates remain in good order because they are preserved by institutions that believe in them, just as stereotyped representations circulate and recirculate in the material and discursive sense because of the work they do in the interests of those who produce them. Morrison's guiding question, "what is [literary whiteness] *for*?" (9), is made even more crucial by an appreciation of an industrial history of a publication practice that emerged in the nineteenth century U.S., the time and place in which much of the writing Morrison investigates in *Playing in the Dark* was first written and published.

This chapter takes up questions of print culture and economies to theorize the stereotype – specifically, the humorous stereotype – as an instance of "coining," that is, as an instance of turning representations into opportunities for securing multiple kinds of profit. Stereotyping as a discursive strategy is not reducible to the printing technology to which it is etymologically tied, but recognizing that the term at least initially drew its force from a printing process that enabled cheap and profitable reproduction highlights what kinds of profit the discursive stereotype, rather than the stereotype plate, might draw, and in whose interests. The first section engages multiple means of approaching the relations between stereotypes and the U.S. humor industry to begin to track what role stereotypes played in the emerging mass culture of the 1890s. After addressing the omnipresence of stereotypes in the nineteenth-century U.S. humor industry, I critique traditional American Humor Studies approaches to the stereotypes and then draw on Jane Tompkins's influential history of sensational literature to propose a more rigorous means of historicizing what might be called the major figure of humor discourse. The force of this section will be to demonstrate that humor stereotypes, and critical accounts that figure the stereotype as canonical or quality literature's abject, cannot be distinguished from matters of economic and cultural capital.

The second section presents a case study in the traffic in stereotypes in the nineteenth-century U.S. humor industry. I focus on one author – Marietta Holley – and two books – *Samantha and the Woman Question* and *Samantha at the World's Fair* – to tell the story of the production and circulation of stereotypes at a point of connection between the 1890s humor industry and women's suffrage. Taking up many of the issues raised in the first section, I work to identify how stereotypes are made to coin economic profit and political agendas within a particular industry. Bhabha writes that "it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency" (66); and while this chapter implicitly bears out his thesis with reference to stereotypes in other fields of meaning, my investigation of the work of Holley, who enjoyed widespread popularity as a humorist in the Progressive Era for her dialect-heavy writing, identifies other powerful "forces" that grant stereotypes the currency and durability Lee regretfully catalogues in his film. By stressing the material dimension of the stereotype throughout this case study, I pinpoint how stereotypes can be made to serve the interests of mass culture, the politics of suffrage, and profit, without relying on some inherent discursive essence (like ambivalence) that cannot ever account in full for the myriad and enlightening ways in which stereotypes are converted into the major figure of ideology.

Markets for Stereotypes

In the late nineteenth-century U.S. humor industry, what we now call stereotypes were good business. From stereoscopes to advertisements, newspaper columns to elite literary humor, and comic valentines to children's board games, stereotypes were an accepted staple of the mass consumer's entertainment diet. Commodified and circulated to the point of near omnipresence, the humorous stereotype, of course, remains part of the twenty-first century U.S. humor industry, and it is precisely this continuity that suggests the urgency of interrogating the stereotype's role in the humor industry during the decades of mass culture's emergence. At stake in such inquiry is the history of a remarkably durable form of mass cultural expression that continues to exert influence on U.S. mass culture.

Any sustained engagement with nineteenth-century literature and ephemera will yield ample evidence of the remarkable currency humor stereotypes enjoyed in the nineteenth century. The notable material culture and ephemera holdings at the Winterthur Museum & Library in Delaware, for instance, maintain virtually no collection devoid of humor stereotypes. Crockett almanacs include anecdotes about ignorant Irishmen and violent suffragists; publishing company catalogues advertise prints of "the heathen chinee" or of "a swell darkey putting on his rig to go to Washington"; comic valentines exaggerate occupational types, claiming in rhyming verse that ugly, fierce-looking factory girls are paid more than they are worth; personal calling-card scrapbooks include cards for establishments like "Smith's confectionery" that depict razor-toting, grinning, watermelon-loving black men (these cards are arranged in close proximity to images of romping kittens and cherubic white babies); the personal early 1890s diary of a traveling ad-man records humorous anecdotes about old Virginia darkeys (I discuss the diary in greater detail in chapter four); and a stereoscope card depicts a scene in which an Irish servant, "Biddy," delivers tomatoes to the dinner table in her undergarments because her mistress asked them to be served "undressed." The impression this archive gives of life with mass culture in the nineteenth-century is, at least in the context of this cornucopia of stereotyped, humorous materials, strikingly familiar to this twenty-first century researcher and consumer.

Patricia A. Turner's *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies* catalogues the widespread commodification of stereotypes with a specific focus on minstrelsy, telling the history of "contemptible collectibles" in the U.S. humor and folk art industries. The resources for profit and racist hegemony in popular culture are for Turner the bad misrepresentations that serve white supremacist ideology, perpetuating common misperceptions about African-Americans that serve racist interests. Turner recognizes no meaningful ambivalence to stereotypes but only a horrifying symbolic violence. She takes stereotypes to task on all levels of popular culture: a contemptible collectible is any object, from a toy bank to an ashtray to a spatula, that is imprinted by or shaped according to negative stereotyped depictions of black people. Attesting to the widespread circulation of stereotyped jokes, but without engaging humor in a sustained way, Turner includes a picture of a comic postcard with a cartoon of a stereotyped African-American maid serving salad in her underwear because "yo' dun tol' me to serve th' salad with out dressin'!" Set against the stereoscope Irish stereotype joke I found in the Winterthur, Turner's postcard bears out her thesis that stereotypes enact an unavoidable and contemptible symbolic violence that crosses product types (stereoscopes and postcards) and races. Both together also demonstrate that certain specific stereotypes or joke-structures enjoyed widespread popularity in these decades, and that the stereotype itself, as a tool for racism and profitable commodification, took on a prominent role in the humor industry. Coining humor, that is, practices of inventing humor products *and* of turning humor to profit, often relied on repetition (or outright copying) of successful jokes and funny images because of a desire for repeatable, predictable profit. This motive for repetition underlines one reason stereotypes serve the interests of mass culture producers so well: not only do they work to reinscribe forms of symbolic violence and domination, but they are also easily repeatable (in fact they are only recognizable as stereotypes if they are easily repeatable) and can thus be relied on to produce relatively predictable results.

This instance of repetition, and the sense in which it registers mass culture's strategic engagement with the stereotype, underscores the value of conceiving the representational stereotype materially, in relation to the stereotype plate and the stereotype printing process. Just as stereotype printing was taken up by Harper's to increase profits by cutting publishing costs, stereotype discourse was taken up by the humor industry to increase profits by attracting and securing a relatively predictable consumer market. Discursive stereotypes were valuable because they were so repeatable, as the two "salad" jokes suggest above: create one joke, and you can instantly reproduce it, even in another medium, because it is a stereotype, a fixed piece of humor that generates predictable and repeatable consumer interest – one of the foremost goals of all mass industries seeking economic profit through sales.

It is worth taking a moment here to stretch the notion of coining humor (perhaps past its useful limits) to put pressure on what it means for a joke to "succeed." That is to say, if it is the case that jokes are manufactured to secure many different kinds of profit, including not just the economic and the political, then it may also be the case that jokes do not necessarily have to be funny to secure that profit. The assumption that when we deal with humor we must enter only the realm of the funny is precisely the means by which humor is divested of history and converted into a unit of an essentialist identity or a universal theory of "human nature" and the means by which its real status as a commodity is shunted to the background. In making this claim I do not mean to suggest that funniness is immaterial to the workings of capital, or that humor writers, editors, publishers and producers were regularly indifferent to the funniness of their products, nor do I intend to imply that funniness can be reckoned apart from questions of commerce; indeed, the bulk of this dissertation is an effort to argue precisely the opposite. But it is valuable here to stretch the definition of humor to include more than merely the funny: the point is, a humorous stereotype might do important work without being funny, and so its failure to elicit the humor affect may not be a sure sign of its failure as a production within the humor industry designed to secure economic or cultural or political capital. A stereotype-driven joke may indeed be funny to some readers; it may fail to elicit humor despite the most comical intentions; but, since the joke is printed to generate profit for, say, a magazine, the joke may still reinforce a nationalist or racist message that affectively consolidates a group through that lucrative political message. This is not to say that humor, nationalism and profit are distinct projects – indeed, my point precisely is that they are interimplicated. For instance, a blackface minstrel cartoon in the January 1893 *Harper's* "Editor's Drawer" that depicts a caricatured black family frightened by sulfur match technology (322), whether or not it elicits humor's affects, may secure profit by interpellating its readers into a racialized, hierarchized identity. Or the "salad" jokes may do the work of reinforcing the stupidity and hopelessly uncivilized nature of the stereotyped African-American or Irish servant long after it has ceased to be funny – and still be doing the work of humor. This approach to humor escapes a kind of essentialism that might say if a humor piece fails to elicit laughter it has failed entirely as humor – since humor is meant to do all kinds of work in addition to producing the humor affect.

In addition to opening up humor to include all kinds of work beyond achieving the funny, approaching humor stereotypes through the lens of multiple means of coining significantly revises an influential American Humor Studies approach to women's humor writing. For instance, Nancy Walker and Linda Morris have argued, as I note in chapter one, that stereotypes were often employed by relatively sophisticated women humor writers for the purpose of reversal. The effort of this criticism is to cast these writers in a new, canonical light, granting their work a complexity that justifies its place in official literary histories and in the classroom. In these accounts, women humorists need to be read and respected as literary writers because they employ stereotypes critically, and not unthinkingly. In *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture*, for instance, Walker rightly notes that "many twentieth-century critics have missed the point of…. most of America's female humorists – largely because the *use* of a stereotype is assumed to constitute an *acceptance* of that stereotype" (20 emphasis original). Walker substitutes for this biased argument a claim that women's writing only "seems to turn on and perpetuate traditional stereotypes of women" when in fact "what female humorists have done with these stereotypes…. is to subvert them" (11). While this argument is forceful and in many senses accurate, Walker does seem to be implying, here and elsewhere in her book, that "subverting" particular stereotypes is in many ways an effort to resist "the stereotype" itself as a representational tool; that is, Walker tries to grant women humorists a sophistication that traditional critics deny them by pointing out that they use stereotypes critically and therefore were not the mindless purveyors of bad writing. Unfortunately, such efforts to recover women's humor writing reinstall traditional canonical grounds of inclusion and exclusion that privilege "complexity" and reject popular generic writing. By virtue of ignoring, or dismissing, questions of profit that complicate the place of stereotypes in literary history, such recovery projects sometimes painfully stretch the reversal hypothesis, neglecting their humorists' far more commonly straightforward use of the humor stereotype as an efficient means for promoting a politics and securing a living. Projects like Walker's work to grant women writers roles in the AHS canon by placing women's writing in the ranks of the sophisticated and complex; they do not challenge the (often gendered) articulation of popular writing to the "nonliterary," to a category with little or no literary value. In the terms John Guillory sets up in *Cultural Capital*, Walker and Morris misidentify the problem of the canon as a problem of exclusion from a list of great authors, rather than as a problem of access to cultural capital that excludes people from a system of power by excluding them from the means of literary production.

For the greater part of the twentieth century, and going back even as far as Fuller's critique of Lowell, the articulation of the stereotype as the literary abject, as bad writing, meant figuring the stereotype as key to a popular literary discourse – and marketplace – of less cultural value than the literature of innovation, experimentation and quality. Jane Tompkins, in her influential *Sensational Designs*, responds critically to such negative articulations of the stereotype. Historicizing popular U.S. nineteenth-century women's writing, Tompkins notes that the discursive technique that came to be called stereotyping (much like other popular writing techniques) meant something quite different for popular writers of the period than it came to mean for much twentieth-century literary criticism (or even for Nathaniel Hawthorne and the successful colleagues he called "scribbling women"). For many popular women authors, stereotypes were a means to secure profit through writing and to enact political "designs" they had on their reading public. In this literature, stereotypes were employed as useful tools for achieving financial and political goals, for effecting cultural work. For Tompkins, the stereotype remains a troubling source of racism and sexism, but its articulation only to racist and sexist hegemony is recognized as not inevitable. The point for Tompkins is not that stereotypes are clean, thoughtful, "complex" representations worthy of admiration but that they are, as Said notes in the epigraph to this chapter, representations that operate "as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (273).

I want to return to the passage that opens my introduction, in which humor writing is dreamt of as sold by the yard, a passage that is significantly nuanced by an appreciation of the trace of stereotype printing processes, and therefore economic determination, in the production of discursive stereotypes. Loomis, articulating certain forms of humor writing as mass-produced materials, stresses the corrupt or base nature of that writing by ascribing to it a low literary status and expressing a hope for the possibilities of mass production to grant the writer freedom from the necessity of actually writing. My effort in this chapter, and indeed in this dissertation, is to take such proposals seriously as indexes of attitudes towards humor writing without agreeing that literature caught up in the marketplace is necessarily corrupted, without reducing the marketplace to a stable structure, without agreeing that literary labor is the same as actual factory labor, and without proposing some fantastic space supposedly outside the market (for example, "national character") as a true context for appreciating humor. Instead, I want to consider humor industry productions – especially, in this chapter, those that rely heavily or entirely on stereotypes – as materials caught up in efforts to coin economic and cultural capital and to achieve political ends. In my discussion of Marietta Holley's writing below, I take up Tompkins' historicization of stereotype writing, and the senses of "coining" I articulate to the stereotype above, as alternative means of engaging the stereotype in a history of trade and profit in the humor industry. In the case of popular political writing, I will suggest that the stereotype functions as an efficient but imperfect means of mobilizing affect quickly. For Holley, as we will see, humor stereotypes grant the opportunity for securing repeatable, predictable capital in the popular book industry even as they are the occasion for promoting women's suffrage in the United States.

Samantha's Suffrage Humor

In *Selling Suffrage*, Margaret Finnegan details how Progressive Era woman suffragists mobilized mass culture technologies and consumer culture practices (such as shopping and advertising) to promote their politics. The result of such mobilization was that an intricate discourse of freedom with a rich history of activism became heavily implicated in the powerful politics of consumer capitalism. This remarkable suturing was in some ways a new twist on the old suffragist tactic of creative articulation: just as suffragists like Sarah Grimke and Sojourner Truth, among others, worked to link women's suffrage to Christian values, and just as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony worked to link women's suffrage to the language of the Declaration of Independence, so too did Progressive suffragists link women's rights to consumer culture. Finnegan's argument considers this kind of modern "selling" of suffrage through the lens of advertising, public performance, and ephemeral merchandise; in this section, I want to extend this analysis to include the use of humor stereotypes in the humor industry. Specifically, I want to theorize how Marietta Holley, a popular woman humorist from the late nineteenth century, engaged humorous stereotypes to earn money and promote women's suffrage. That is, I want to theorize how Holley coined humor through the stereotype, generating both economic and political profit. My intervention, however, will focus less on consumerism than on humor practice in popular print, so that my effort will be less to capture how Holley imagined consumerism (broadly conceived) as a tool for promoting women's suffrage than to capture how Holley converted through discursive and material forms the popular book and the humor stereotype into an opportunity to sell books and promote women's rights.[2]

Holley's dialect humor, which was immensely popular in the late nineteenth century, is written in the first person from the perspective of her famous character, Samantha Allen. Much of Samantha's humor, like much dialect humor of the period, is derived from misspelling and malapropisms that were the stereotyped mode of discourse for down-home characters whose earthy wisdom came hand in hand with ignorance. Her characterizations are also heavily stereotyped: rural men are honest but proud and vain, unwed women are vicious husband-hunters. Holley's writing provides a rich means of engaging the relations between the humor industry and stereotypes, and of gauging the material dimensions of the stereotype, especially since her immense popular success in the late nineteenth century – one reviewer called her "the female Mark Twain" (Curry xiii) – and her later fall to obscurity in the twentieth century may both be due in part to her engagement with stereotypes and the ways in which her books were written, published and marketed. That is to say, Holley's work is significant for an analysis of the traffic in stereotypes in the U.S. humor industry, and for investigating the material dimension of stereotypes, because it was outstandingly popular and is generally representative (especially as a work of dialect writing) of humor book writing and publishing. Her books also neatly index how stereotypes helped sell books and do the cultural and political work of advocating for women's suffrage, work that has been obscured by analyses of Holley invested in recovering her writing in order to place it in a literary canon.

Holley's success can best be measured not only by sales and contract size (she was paid $14,000 for *Samantha at the World's Fair*, which sold over 70,000 copies) but also by creative public responses to her work. Kate Winter cites one compelling example of Holley's popularity (focused on one of Samantha's fellow Jonesville townspeople, Betsey Bobbett, the stereotyped husband-seeker):

> It seemed that everyone was reading or talking about the Samantha books. Betsey Bobbett clubs had been formed where friends met to read chapters form [sic] the books, sometimes taking parts to render dramatically. It was not just an idle woman's afternoon amusement. In Chicago one club included a senator and three Presbyterian clergymen. Clara Barton sometimes joined, preferring to read the part of Betsey, but more often when she needed respite from her work establishing the Red Cross, she would spend a day sleeping and reading

> Samantha. Several vocal ensembles became known as the Jonesville Choir.... By the spring of 1880 Betsey Bobbett clubs were meeting and performing dramatic readings all around the state. The clubs used local talent and interpreted well-known episodes, so they were very well attended, but not by Holley. (68)

The history of these clubs, which celebrated not just Bobbett but also Holley's other popular characters, suggests just how popular Holley's books were, and also neatly captures the myriad ways in which readers themselves engaged her writing, repeating and even performing Holley's stereotyped humor as a form of creative expression and as an excuse for forming meaningful if ephemeral communities.

Holley's popular stereotypes center on the traits and relationships of her two main characters, Samantha and Josiah Allen. Samantha is a stout, dialect-speaking woman, who works hard to maintain her family's economic and moral stability. Occasionally, she finds the time to write up her experiences and views for the benefit of the American public (Holley's Samantha books are written in the first person from the heroine's point of view) under the ironic but revealing name "Josiah Allen's Wife." The ultra-traditional moniker signals Samantha's leanings but also humorously mocks ultra-patriarchal attitudes towards women. Josiah is a vain, ignorant, tiny, incompetent man whose vast political stupidity and treasured prejudices are matched only by his robust but ridiculous ambition to participate in national politics and secure social respect. The couple's political commitments flow from their stereotyped character traits: Samantha advocates a "megum" (medium) approach to life that avoids extremism without neglecting the need for political change, especially in relation to women's rights. A self-motivated, independent thinker, Samantha is a stark and humorous contrast to Josiah, whose bandwagon conservative commitments always follow the lead of patriarchs he admires on both the local and national scale. The inevitable battles that erupt between the two characters, however, are always tempered by their unswerving devotion to their marriage, family, community and nation. Holley's stereotyped characters imply that average people ought to engage with local and national politics, advocating for socially beneficial change without upsetting traditional community (and rural) values. It is precisely this relatively conservative foundation that leaves Holley room to draw affective connections between women's suffrage and traditional rural values: by establishing a domestic safe house for political discussion, Holley implies that whatever else might be at risk when people engage in debate over women's suffrage, a secure, predictable, affectively satisfying home life is not.

In *Samantha on the Woman Question*, first published in 1913 and very much indebted to Holley's earlier work, Samantha journeys to Washington, D.C., to join in a suffrage parade, pressure senators and the president on women's rights, and advocate for a friend, Serepta, who is dramatically suffering from chauvinist laws. The senator with whom she has the longest conversation is romantically and politically devoted to stereotypes that justify women's inequality, and thus he is a fine representative of the kind of chauvinism Holley critiques in other characters (indeed, since this book, published late in Holley's career, actually cribs entire passages from many of her previous works, taking this senator, who is himself stereotyped, as representative of her formulaic male chauvinists is doubly appropriate). Throughout the interview, the senator upholds all of the familiar clichés: "'I would love to oblige Serepta,' sez [the senator], 'because she belongs to such a lovely sect. Wimmen are the loveliest, most angelic creatures that ever walked the earth; they are perfect, flawless, like snow and roses" (85). After Samantha's firm reply that women are actually "disagreeable creeters a good deal of the time," and a reference to Josiah, the senator, unmoved, replies,

> 'Ah, your husband! Yes, wimmen should have husbands instead of rights. They do not need rights; they need freedom from all cares and sufferin'. Sweet lovely beings! let them have husbands to lift them above all earthly cares and trials! Oh! Angels of our homes,' sez he, liftin' his eyes to the heavens and kinder shettin' 'em, some as if he wuz goin' into a spazzum. 'Fly around, ye angels, in your native hants; mingle not with rings and vile laws, flee away, flee above them!' (85-86).

Holley contrasts the senator's erotically charged speech with the stereotyped character Serepta, who is ugly, mean and poor, if morally upright; and she contrasts the senator's exaggerated love and respect for "women" with oppressive laws that ruin women's lives merely to defend men's political and cultural dominance. The senator's devotion to stereotypes, however, is not the subject of Samantha's ire for its generalizations as generalizations, but instead for its patently inaccurate and self-interested representation of women.

The senator's devotion to, and embodiment of, masculinist stereotypes, however, is significantly different from that of Samantha's diminutive husband, for while Josiah's belief in angel-in-the house stereotypes is an actual belief, reflecting the hypocrisy of stereotyped rural manhood, the Senator's assertions are represented as the doublespeak of Washingtonian slipperiness, self-interest, and indifference. Samantha replies,

> Cease instantly, or my sickness will increase, for such talk is like thoroughwort or

> lobelia to my moral and mental stomach. You know and I know that these angelic tender bein's, half-clothed, fill our streets on icy midnights, huntin' up drunken husbands and fathers and sons. They are driven to death and to moral ruin by the miserable want liquor drinkin' entails. They are starved, they are froze, they are beaten, they are made childless and hopeless by drunken husbands killin' their own flesh and blood.... If men really believed all they say about wimmen, and I think some on 'em do in a dreamy sentimental way – If wimmen are angels, give'em the rights of angels. Who ever hearn of a angel foldin' up her wing and goin' to the poor-house or jail through the fault of somebody else?.... You ort to keep the angels from bein' tormented and bruised and killed, etc. (87-89)

The senator's reply is hilarious, and entirely in keeping with his clichéd devotion to meaningless talk: "'Ahem,' sez he, 'as it were, ahem'" (89). Samantha's relatively clever response to the Senator's stereotypes renders him speechless not by challenging his cliches with detailed descriptions of individual people, but simply by replacing talk about angels with accounts of abused women living under limited suffrage and devilish men.

The force of Holley's critique here is not that stereotypes inevitably do a kind of representation violence but that *some* stereotypes do that work. While it is true that Holley does try to "reverse" stereotypes about women as angels in the house, she does not replace them with nuanced, complex representations that refuse generalization, but only with another kind of stereotype. For Holley, as Tompkins implies in her own description of "sensational" nineteenth-century women's writing that relied heavily on stereotypes, the point is not to attack the stereotype as the symptom of bad writing but instead to promote stereotypes that are more likely to do the kind of political work she advocates and are more likely to sell the kind of books she wants to sell. Holley coins humorous stereotypes, and renders sentimental stereotypes of angels-in-the-house humorously ridiculous, not to combat stereotypes-as-stereotypes but to mobilize them in the interests of the kinds of profit she seeks.

While this summary provides a representative look at Holley's stereotype characters and at her engagement with women's rights, Holley's popularity and politics also need to be situated in relation to the material publication and circulation of her writing, especially given my effort to grasp the stereotype's material history. Her books were commodified through the process of publication, advertising and sales, a material process that plays an important part in the story of her success in trafficking stereotypes. To round out my account of the coining of stereotypes in Holley's books, my analysis of the significance of the stereotype in her usage, and my sense of the relationship between discursive stereotypes and print culture, I will tell the story of the publication of one specific text: Holley's popular 1893 publication, *Samantha at the World's Fair*. Tracking the history of its writing, publication and circulation in the 1890s will offer another perspective on the traffic of stereotypes in the late nineteenth century, tell the market history of one of Holley's most successful books, and stress again the material dimension to the history of the humor stereotype.

Fair was published as the first in a three-book contract with Funk & Wagnalls, a company mostly known for its religious productions. Holley was able to secure a $14,000 advance for the book, an impressive amount for any writer in the 1890s humor industry. Her publisher received ample return, since the book sold 76,000 copies of the first edition and was reprinted twelve times (Curry 69-71). Like previous books written under the pseudonym "Josiah Allen's Wife," *Fair* chronicles through first-person narration the fictional Samantha Allen's small-town life with her husband, her firmly held politics of feminism and "megumness," and her experiences traveling to a contemporary place and event (in this case, the Chicago World's Fair and Columbian Exposition). Also like those previous books, *Fair's* documentation of travel is second-hand; Holley very rarely actually visited the places she wrote about, instead relying on guide-books and other documents for her information. Intended to sell for its timeliness and as a historical artifact, as a testament to the imagined historical significance of the fair in a nationalistic history of the United States, the book was somewhat rushed, despite severe illness on Holley's part (Winter 116). *Fair* engages with a plurality of genres, including regional, suffragist, and travel literatures, but the book's most prevalent literary qualities root it solidly in a humor tradition characterized by phonetically rendered dialects, rambling narratives, and a broad range of stereotyped characters, beliefs and relationships.

While not primarily sold, like her earlier books, by subscription, a form of book distribution on the wane but still current in the later nineteenth century, *Fair* mimics the material qualities of subscription books which were typically "bigger, fatter, gaudier, and [more] copiously illustrated" (Cook 152) than their trade book counterparts. Subscription books, often seen as "distinctly low-class" (Camfield 103), had to be massive to justify their still relatively reasonable price (usually from $2 to $3 [Lehmann-Haupt 251]) and to emphasize their value as display objects and family heirlooms. As one historian puts it, size and weight were especially important to the subscription book industry since "the buyer, who was typically rural, a farmer or small tradesman with little education, [felt that] bulk was an index of value" (Kaplan 62). In fact, Bret Harte once joked of a Twain book sold through subscription (by the same publisher, the American Publishing Company, as Holley's earlier works): "the book has that intrinsic worth of bigness and durability which commends itself to the rural economist, who likes to get a material return for his money" (qtd. in Cook 170).[3]

A brief discussion of *Fair's* material make-up will highlight some of the particular qualities of subscription-style books. The book is octavo sized, distinguishing itself from many humor books, which were often published in much smaller 16mo editions, and announcing itself as a substantial production. At 694 quality pages, the book is thick (2 inches/5.1 cm) and heavy. The book's weight is complemented by the striking cloth cover of bright gold letters and bright silver illustration impressed into a blue background (figure one). Samantha and her husband, Josiah, illustrated in black, stand in the bottom right hand corner, gazing upon the pavilion and the surrounding fair. The spine is similarly gold and silver on a blue background, but here the Fair's famous Ferris wheel stands in for the exposition. Curiously, the author's pseudonym is only written on the cover and not on the spine, perhaps emphasizing that the book's value lies in its souvenir-style subject matter and its material value rather than its literary associations (also, "Samantha" itself perhaps stood in as much for the author as the "By Josiah Allen's Wife" on the cover). Just as the book's weight connotes value, so do the gold and silver colors speak to the book's status as a financial investment. The cover's typography is elaborate, at odds perhaps with the homeliness of Samantha's language, narrative and politics. For instance, the golden capital "S" beginning "Samantha" is especially ornate, almost to the point of awkwardness. Here the book's text and message of "megumness" seem opposed to its showy materials. In the production of trade books, markets were as much a consideration as in the production of subscription books; but for subscription books there seems to have been little effort to conceal the book's commodity status. Rather, in subscription book production, print materials emphasized the book's object value.

The sheer weight of the book as an interference with reading is perhaps offset by the large, clear type, spacious margins and thick paper found within. Wide margins often connote luxury, and certainly such a connotation would be consistent with the book's other deluxe qualities. Remarkably, there is little to no show-through on the pages; that is, when reading a page one cannot see the ink printed on the other side. Such a quality again connotes luxury and similarly promotes easy reading. Further, there are few if any "rivers," those unsightly vertical trails of blank space between letters and words that appear on a page carelessly set. *Fair*, then, provides a read that may be limited in time because of the book's heaviness even as it encourages a casual experience through its figuratively light typographic materials.

Like many humor books, and many books published in the subscription tradition, *Fair* is copiously illustrated. Moreover, the illustrations are distributed throughout the volume in a variety of ways that make them seem as important to the experience of the book as the text itself. For instance, while some pages are entirely taken up by illustrations, other pages are broken up by illustrations which appear at the top or bottom of the page or in the middle. Sometimes illustrations appear at the side of the page and "interfere" with standard typographical layout, pushing the text to the side and taking up some extra space in the margins (figure two).

An advertisement for *Fair* held in the Downs collection at the Winterthur library neatly registers the audiences Funk & Wagnalls imagined for the book and suggests the links between material production and the traffic in stereotypes (figures three and four). First, the advertisement explicitly addresses agents (booksellers who would travel community-to-community and door-to-door). It is often forgotten that, just as magazine editors had to please advertisers in addition to readers, so too did subscription books have to please agents in addition to consumers. Agents had to believe the book was appealing or they would focus their energies on other publications and so significantly hinder the book's potential circulation. To this end, the ad stresses the book's popularity and repeatedly asserts its "perennial" or timeless status as a book readers will continue to purchase over the years. Stereotyped characters, established genres, and established material book production techniques would have been particularly desirable to agents who wanted to be sure of a book's sales from the outset. The ad's list of the book's valuable qualities provides a kind of recipe for the book's promotion door-to-door to ensure predictable, repeatable profit. Aside from the various qualities emphasized by the "press" testimonials, the ad highlights the book's massive sales; its draw as the production of an established author writing another installment in a well-known series; its "perennial" or timeless qualities; its usefulness as a "gift-book"; its copious illustrations; its collector's status ("no home library should lack a copy"); and, through reference to the publishers, Funk & Wagnalls, its non-threatening, religiously-correct content (an emphasis furthered by the list, on the reverse side of the ad, of many books with religious themes). As the Boston Herald citation succinctly explains, "It has many claims to interest and value."

The ad, of course, does not say something like "Packed with humorous stereotypes guaranteed to delight!" or "Votes for Women Now!" The illustrations, however, in their cartoon-like quality, assure agents and readers of the book's caricature-appeal, and the trademark of "Josiah Allen's Wife" itself functions as a kind of guarantee that the book will contain Holley's popular characters, dialect humor and suffrage politics. Samantha's finger-wagging portrait perhaps best captures this aspect of the ad: dressed in down-home (but clean and fashionable) clothes, glaring over her glasses and gesturing with conviction, the image even today is instantly recognizable as that of an overbearing but wise matron-type who will dispense stern wisdom on any topic she desires. And, as the *Christian Standard* of Cincinnati notes, "It will do you good."

The ad, then, is a precise example of why I have spent so much time describing subscription publication and *Fair's* material make up (in addition to my having developed a sense that print culture manufacturing processes such as printing and stereotyping can sometimes be turned into useful and revealing metaphors, as long as the sense of metaphor does not distract from the specificity of the discursive stereotype's material dimension). The point is that Holley's traffic in humor stereotypes is entirely in line with subscription publishing's effort to secure a repeatable, predictable audience for agents and readers, an effort that, importantly, is the same as that of any producer in a mass culture industry, and one that is also in line with the interests of promoting women's suffrage. For book selling agents, the stereotype's ambivalence was less significant than its durability, since stereotypes acted as a kind of guarantee (or at least good bet) of a book's potential mass appeal and sales. This point is doubly important since it accounts in part for Samantha's popularity in the 1890s and for the durability of popular nineteenth-century humor stereotypes in general, since the desire for repeatable, predictable mass sales still drives the humor industry today. The stereotype's capacity to generate profit cannot be distinguished from its role in the emerging mass culture of the 1890s (or even the established but still dynamic mass culture of the 2000s).

Holley, however, was committed to more than profit. Women's suffrage was one of Holley's most enduring political commitments and accounted in part for the immense success of her Samantha books. In much of her Samantha writing, Holley explicitly critiques stereotypes circulated by antisuffragists to mock women's rights and to promote patriarchal politics. Holley does not, however, contest these stereotypes as stereotypes, something she would be unlikely to do since her characters were themselves so stereotyped. Instead, Holley challenges certain stereotypes as misrepresentations, but not "the stereotype" as constitutively misrepresentative. In the introduction to her anthology of Holley's most compelling Samantha suffrage writing, Jane Curry summarizes Holley's political commitments to a kind of "conservative" suffragism:

> Like the suffragists of the 1890s, Holley was optimistic about what female suffrage could accomplish, and she was essentially conservative in ideology. The argument that women who vote would be better wives certainly implies no radical change in sex roles. Though she considered herself "megum" in all things, Samantha was rejecting only the frivolous, overdone, and sentimental characteristics of the genteel tradition. The morality and conservatism were still hers. Like the suffragists, who were primarily white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon

> Protestants, she encouraged social reform, not social revolution. The basic structure of society was not attacked, merely women's lack of representation in it. (11-12)

Curry's account is generally accurate, though it errs on the side of reading Holley's politics through the lens of late-twentieth-century feminism. Indeed, while Samantha's devotion to "megumness" meant she was explicitly against what Curry calls "social revolution," nonetheless she did attack the basic *patriarchal* structure of a society which denied women the vote, made wives the property of husbands, and denied wives the right to own property. In many ways, Samantha's down-home mediumness, like her proud nationalism which I discuss in chapter one, might be understood as making her radical political beliefs more palatable. Still, her use of stereotypes should be understood as generally in line with the story Curry tells, of a writer challenging cultural beliefs and government policy without suggesting they be overthrown.

In addition to deploying familiar stereotypes for comical and political effect, Holley marshaled popular events – often of national importance, such as the Chicago World's Fair – to promote women's suffrage and women's rights in general. A typical Holley passage will portray a hardworking woman scouring and lifting while being lectured to by a masculine antisuffragist touting that same woman's daintiness and fragility (*Samantha Rastles the Woman Question* provides many examples of this). Holley's occasional reversal of stereotypes, however, does not constitute a sophisticated "literary" understanding of (or investment in) modern standards of literary critique but instead a practical sense of the political opportunity inherent to popular literature (because of its wide readership) that meshed well with her dialect humor. This contest is waged over the relative accuracy of representations and the need for political representation through women's suffrage, not over uncouth *forms* of literary representation that upset literary critics interested in analyzing works as complex, unified wholes with experimental styles.

Late-nineteenth-century writers frequently promoted suffragist and anti-suffragist designs through their mass-produced fiction, and the topic was especially fruitful for humorists. This was all part of their effort to be "doers of the word," to cite the title to Carla L. Peterson's important work on African-American women speakers and writers, which traces other instances of suffrage-related products and performances dedicated to mobilizing affect. As Margaret Finnegan notes, because the suffragist agenda was a national (and even international) one, suffragists took advantage of all available means for reaching a mass audience, of doing the word. But because these means often involved developing relationships with mass culture producers, and also developing tactics for addressing a mass audience with shared interests and world views, suffragist politics became bound up with the emerging discourses and politics of mass culture. Holley's prominent status as a popular woman writer sympathetic to women's suffrage meant she corresponded with prominent suffrage advocates, but her desire to remain near home meant she practiced her suffrage politics through her writing more than through the speeches and activism of other, more prominent, advocates. Indeed, Susan B. Anthony once solicited Holley for material for the suffragist paper *National Citizen*, requesting any Samantha material "*too decidedly* woman suffrage for the popular press" (emphasis original, qtd. in Winter 66). Holley eventually met Anthony, who later compared her to another famous suffragist: "You are like Elizabeth Cady Stanton. I often tell her she is as bold as a lion in her own chimney corner" (qtd. in Winter 67). Holley's reticence to take on public roles, or even to travel, was at times staggering. Indeed, Holley did not even begin seriously writing until some time in her thirties, and even then refused to leave Jefferson County, her place of birth, until 1881 at the age of 45 (Winter 71). But Holley's choice to check herself out of certain kinds of mobility cannot be understood as a decision to ignore sophisticated means of engaging an audience in the interests of politics. Holley engaged mass culture and national politics through dialect writing and stereotyped characters, and did so without, in a sense, leaving home, choosing to sell and promote suffrage politics on the national stage through mass publishing rather than speeches and appearances. Here, her trafficking in stereotypes is entirely in line with Tompkins' account of the cultural work of nineteenth-century popular women writers, effecting what we might call "humorous" rather than sensational designs on her readership.

Postscript

While my effort here has been to open up theorizations of the stereotype to include the matter of their profitability in relation to matters of economics and politics, and to explain an instance of suffrage politics in a popular genre, I have also theorized reasons for the manifest durability of stereotypes. So I want to conclude with a brief example of the fate of Holley's work – if not precisely the stereotypes she deploys – to complicate my effort to explain suffragist engagements with the stereotype. I choose to end, quite appropriately, with a figurative question mark, to punctuate the constantly changing history of the articulation of stereotypes, markets, and consumer cultures to women's rights.

While the making and marketing of *Samantha at the World's Fair* could be read by critics of subscription publishing as hopelessly middle or lower class, the materials nonetheless appealed to a wide audience, serving the interests of Holley's politics and pocketbook. Marketing the book as a historical timepiece, as a means of preserving an important moment in American history on the reader's mantelpiece or bookshelf, allowed Holley's homespun but still progressive ideas to take their place next to the family Bible and the farmer's almanac. For Samantha Allen, a charged discourse of patriotism is a political opportunity to link nationalism to women's freedom. Holley's political message is a product, then, of the book's materials and its means of circulation in addition to its writing. Stereotypes and subscription publishing, and a heavy, gaudy book, allowed Samantha to reach a wide audience in the late nineteenth century.

But the very materials that allowed this circulation to take place – the heaviness of the book, the bright colors and gaudy cover, the copious illustrations, the entertaining stereotypes – perhaps caused a historical revision when such materials took on different meanings. For those very qualities that signaled subscription publishing in the nineteenth century came to signal a much different genre in the twentieth: that of children's books.[4] Copious illustrations, gaudy covers, heavy weight, unapologetically presented stereotypes, large type and wide spacing -- all elements of Holley's book -- are also all elements of the modern children's book. It is perhaps for this reason that *Samantha at the World's Fair* is currently described by one bookseller at "antiques online" as "An interesting view of travels to the World's Fair by a child"; and perhaps this is also why the book is housed at the University of Alberta in the "Children's Historical Collection." Holley's book, once circulating its message more effectively through its materials and stereotypes, now has that message grossly altered by a changed interpretation of its physical characteristics. Certainly such changes in classification make new readings available, but it seems in this case the reduction of striking (if "megum") feminist politics and humor to a children's narrative (itself a genre with complex relations to canonicity and a curious relationship to subscription book history) consigns Holley's writing to the wrong generic classification and obscures that book's real history in the 1890s suffrage movement and humor industry. Perhaps this change in classification highlights the urgency of theorizing the historically specific political purposes of stereotypes, not to mention the material means of their production, so that we might recognize the full impact of the manifestly dynamic ways we evaluate them.

NOTES

[1] A curious example of a nineteenth-century publishing industry joke suggests the ubiquitous availability of stereotyping as a kind of material metaphor for expressing professional anxieties about developments in mass publishing technology. At an 1878 New York State Law Stenographers' Association meeting, one speaker tried to affirm stenography's solid, professional future through an imaginative, humorous fiction. Deriding Thomas Edison's new phonograph device for its deficiencies - next to the professional practice of phonography (shorthand writing) - in recording speech, the presenter "reported an accident by which he learned the phonograph could 'stereotype' any object introduced into its 'funnel.' A cat in the funnel produced kittens; strawberries berried out of season; money reproduced itself" (Gitelman 63-64). Technology historian Lisa Gitelman cites this joke as an example of "how material aural experience was to the culture of shorthand. Sound was an object, like a cat or cash, and having been made material, it could provide an object for the phonograph, just as print or typeface provided the matter of stereotype printing" (64). Certainly the joke figures sound as the key component in a fantastic process of material conversion, but the joke's imaginative expression of professional anxiety over machines capable of infinite reproducibility suggests not only sound's status as a material object but also sound's potential for commodification.

[2] My investigation of the work of Holley, who enjoyed widespread popularity as a humorist in the Progressive Era for her dialect-heavy writing, subtly works to identify powerful forces that link humor stereotypes with what I call, in an essay forthcoming in *Canadian Review of American Studies*, the political traffic in affect. While this chapter is informed by a number of powerful studies that theorize affect in relation to mass culture, such as Anne Cvetkovich's *Mixed Feelings*, Glenn Hendler's *Public Sentiments*, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*, the influence of these works on my argument is limited, since although each takes up the question of affect in relation to mass culture with insight and rigor, none addresses humor in any depth. While I believe this has to do with the institutional history of American Humor Studies I touch on in the first chapter, and with the more pressing need for cultural critics to theorize trauma, sentimentalism, and nostalgia, nonetheless I maintain that insofar as these studies neglect humor they miss an important opportunity to test their theories and to richly historicize their inquiries. To this end, my focus in this section on one particular figure in the late-nineteenth-century humor industry puts

to the test my theorization of the humor stereotype and its relations to different kinds of profit even as it extends Finnegan's observation that "historians have largely ignored the connections between consumerism and the woman suffrage movement" (4) by tracking similar connections between humor, politics, and affect in one popular writer's effort to promote women's suffrage in the United States. Another point of connection between affect and the stereotype, which I may explore more fully in a future project, is the important sense in which stereotypes are supposed to make readers feel, or not feel, especially in relation to issues of literary taste. This would have the virtue of picking up on Raymond Williams' theory of "structures of feeling" (a theory that also informs Hendler's work on sentiment in nineteenth-century America). As Williams notes, "the term is difficult, but 'feeling' is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or ideology" (132). For Williams, feelings need to be understood as actual experiences that are really lived, as determined and structured but in no way devoid of agency:

> as a matter of cultural theory this is a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of asocial material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formations of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (133)

Such an approach to affect also might have the virtue of fitting neatly into a methodology that looks for forms of conversion as instances of the work of mass culture, capitalism, ideology. For instance, in the classic opposition between high culture and low culture, high culture advocates try to convert the stereotype into doing the work of interpellation through affect; that is, when you encounter a stereotype you are to not supposed to respond according to the stereotype's surface affective call; instead, you are to respond according to the negative affect of bad taste. In this example, a structure of feeling is articulated to taste and class and converted to serve the interests of mass culture, which relies on the opposition of high and low culture. For my work in this chapter, the important point is that affect is at play and at stake when writers deploy, convert, and coin humor stereotypes.

[3] The perceived class status of subscription book readers - from the perspective of the official managers of high culture - is perhaps best captured by William Dean Howells, that arbiter of high taste, who declared in 1893: "No book of literary quality was made to go by subscription except Mr. Clemens' books....and I

think these went because the subscription public never knew what good literature they were" (qtd. in Kaplan 63).

The successful, pioneering advertising agent George Rowell wrote of subscription books (and of advertising for agents to sell those books):

> One of the best lines of business early developed was the advertisements of publishers for local agents to canvass for so-called subscription books, which were publications of pretentious appearance that were withheld from trade, and therefore only to be had by subscription through an agent. These books were printed on thick paper, showily bound, padded to fill out a requisite number of pages [Mark Twain notoriously kept to the 600-or-so page requirement], were generally sold for $3.00 or $3.50; and upon each sale the agent was allowed a profit of 40 per cent. The occupants of the farm houses of the country seemed to hunger for these showy volumes. The prices of produce were high, paper money was plenty, and an active canvasser of good address often made enough money in a season to furnish a capital on which he, too, could become a publisher and eventually make a fortune all his own.... Some of the subscription books reached editions of a quarter of a million copies or more, and yielded a substantial competence for their enterprising publishers. (104)

Winter cites another moment in U.S. national and publishing history that was to have a profound impact on the humor industry: the end of the Civil War. Writing of the American Publishing Company, which published both Twain and Holley, Winter notes:

> After the Civil War there was a great boom in book sales by subscription as thousands of demobilized soldiers without stable employment were available as book agents. Door-to-door canvassing, getting the books directly from the publisher to the reader, was a sure method of increasing sales. The agents were persistent and persuasive; it was difficult to say no to a man who camped on the doorstep. By this method agents could sell thirty books for every thousand residents in a town, reaching folk who would never venture into a bookstore. [Elisha] Bliss's success with Twain's book [*Innocents Abroad*]was enormous. Extravagantly illustrated with 234 woodcuts by True Williams, the books sold for $3.50, clothbound. When it was first issued,

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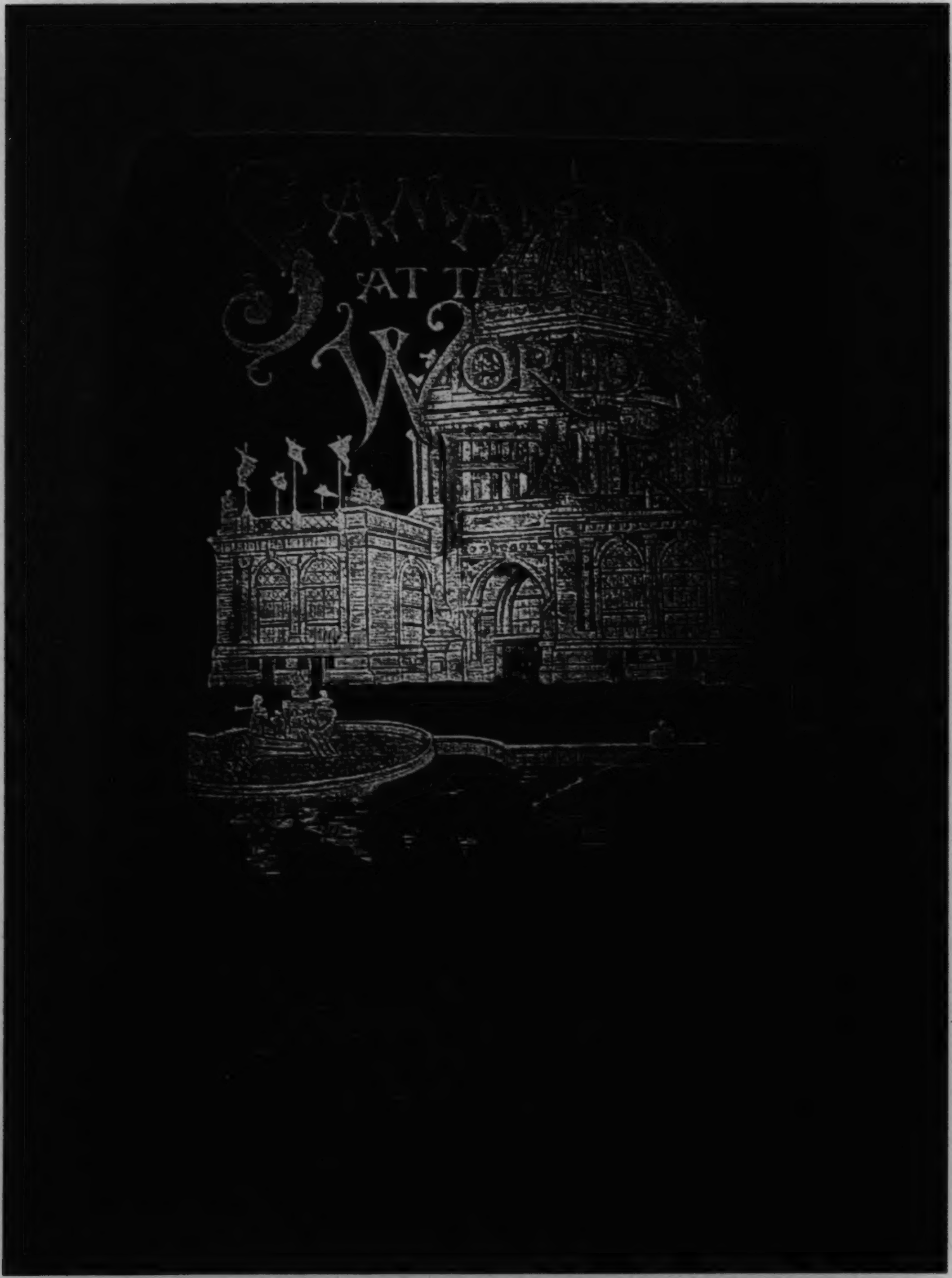
> agents were selling nearly four thousand copies a month. (41)

[4] Lehmann-Haupt writes a curiously defensive account of how subscription book purchasers behaved that relates subscription books to children's reading practices:

> ...some students of the nineteenth century have doubted that the books which subscription agents sold from door to door were really read. They have suggested that they were bought mainly for their prestige value, by quality folk and especially by those who wanted to be considered as such. In certain instances, and with some of these items, that was probably the case.... But there were always children around who were curious, and many of the books were planned for casual perusal, with their hundreds of illustrations and their anecdotal style of writing. So these books were read and used. Many of them were not literary in character, but practical, containing advice on letter-writing, legal transactions, medical care, housekeeping and gardening. Other groups of volumes sought to combine instruction and entertainment, usually in the form of anthologies, encyclopedias and dictionaries. (251)

Chapter Two – Figure One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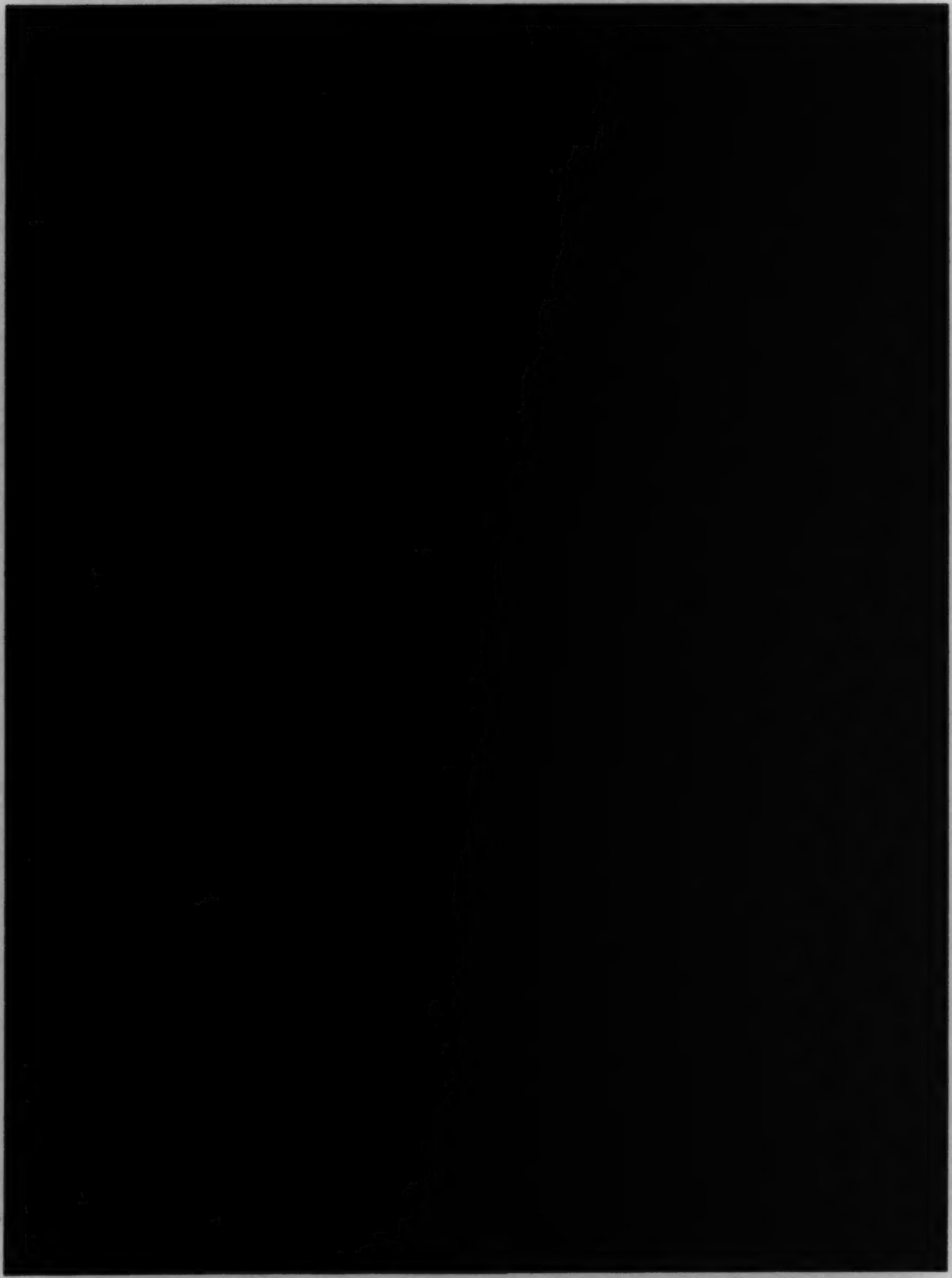
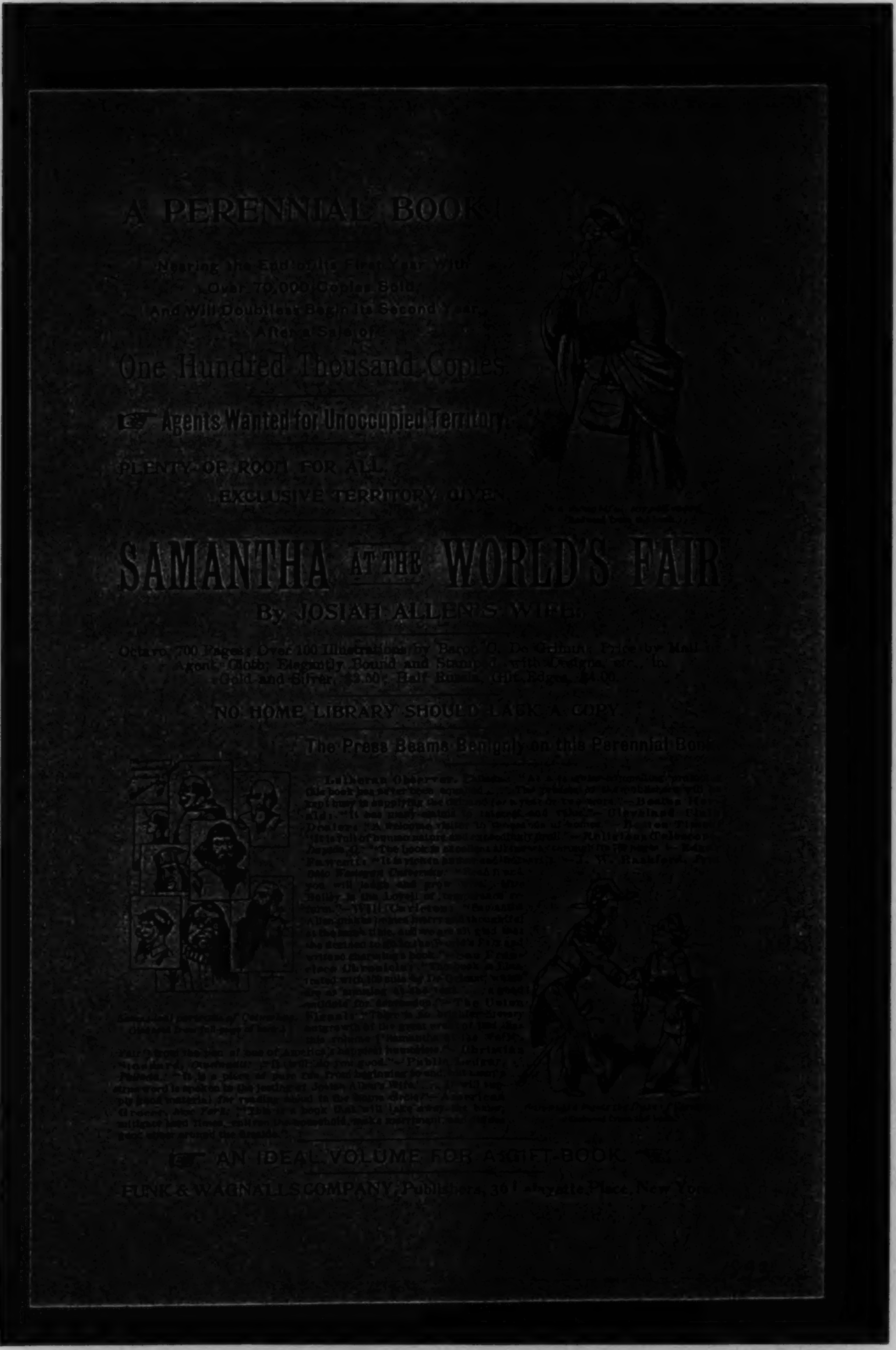
Chapter Two – Figure Two



Chapter Two – Figure Three



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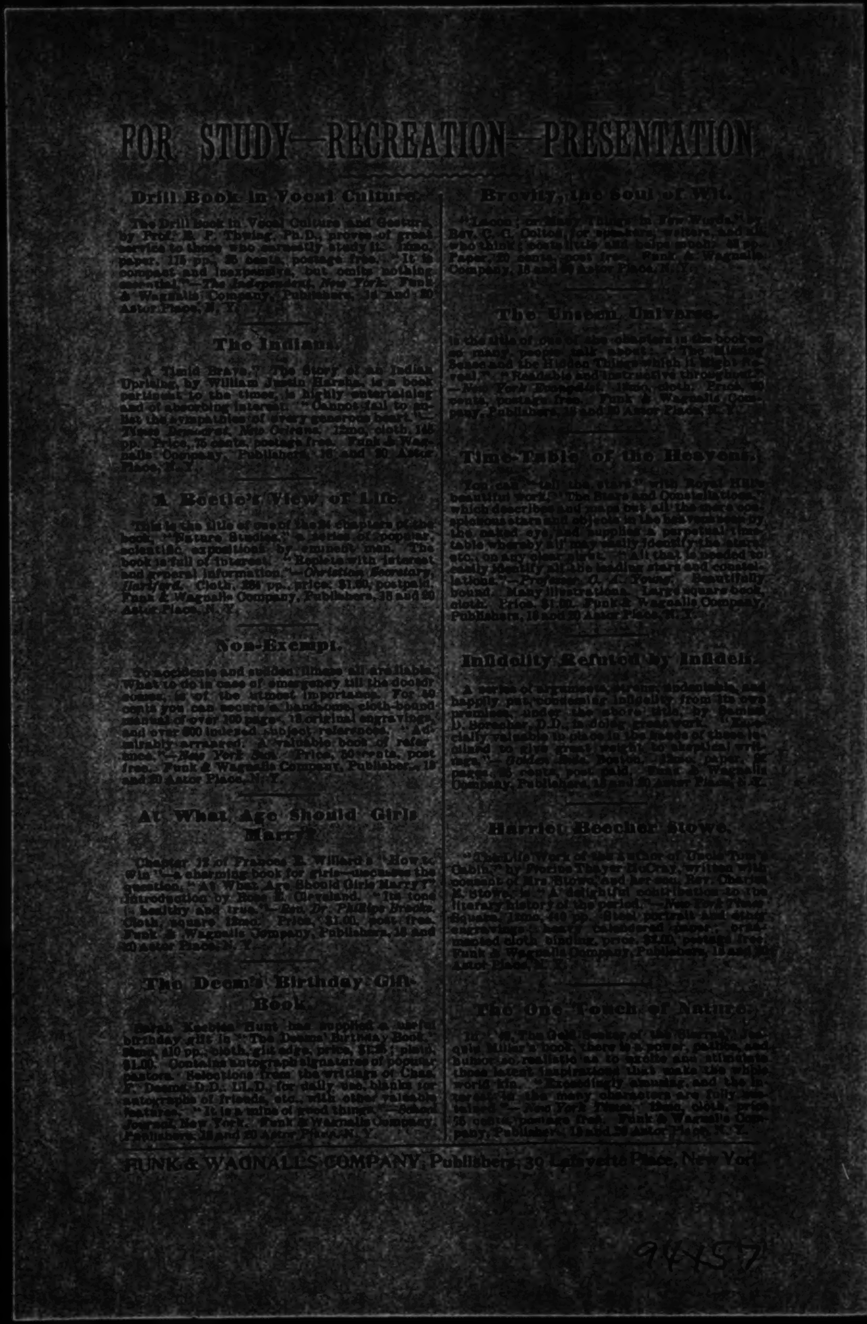

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Part Two

Industrial Conversions

Humor (or what passes for it) not only permeates but actually saturates
the bulk of America's wondrous type yield.

-Henry Clay Lukens

Chapter Three: History from *Harper's*

It's one thing in real life, but another in *Harper's*.

-James L. Ford

History by the Yard

The sleek, modern *Harper's Magazine* of today bears little resemblance to the fat, ornate *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the very nature of the publication has radically altered, since today's *Harper's* is a nonprofit organization (saved in 1980 by the MacArthur Foundation and now operated by the Harper's Magazine Foundation) while its 1890s counterpart was decidedly for profit. A recent research trip to the magazine's offices in Manhattan impressed me with this difference. Filled with visions of Franklin Square's hallowed furniture, emblems of elite literary culture, not to mention an almost stereotypical (and certainly embarrassing) Canadian prairie boy's fantasies of New York cultured life, I was genuinely startled to find the *Harper's* offices, with their white walls and flat basement-style carpets, more like any old Saskatchewan vacuum-sales workplace than the mahogany-filled cultural edifice I was anticipating. Most alarming, however, was the almost total absence of the "history" I expected the place to exude. The "archive" I came to inspect, it turned out, was a spare modern magazine writer's archive, with videotapes, old posters, stacks of extra copies, and a hip, cranky intern tapping away at an iMac in the corner. The magazines I expected to find in pristine condition, carefully tended through the years, were instead the familiar bound versions I had first studied in Alberta and could find in almost any university library in Canada. Like their canuck counterparts, these bound magazines had had the covers and ads wrenched out in the familiar, brutal assumption that such print materials somehow bore no relation to the magazine's enduring value. The only records left were contained in a dilapidated filing cabinet lodged in a narrow hallway between the front desk and the bathroom. As my eminent contact energetically and proudly informed me, that diminutive, ancient cabinet contained the transaction records for all of the articles published in the magazine's long and glorious history (it didn't – I found little or nothing prior to 1900) (see figures 1, 2, 3). There were some additional documents "in storage," certainly, but those magic words seemed to imply an impassable barrier or black hole rather than a comforting residence for the records of a nationally important institution.

My expectations of a historical gold-mine, however, were not without foundation, and I soon came to feel less like a naïve, unlucky graduate student and more like a plain, old-fashioned sucker. *Harper's*, after all, has consistently trumpeted its glorious past in celebratory anniversary publications and house histories. Even 1960s era editor John Fischer's rejection of postbellum *Harper's* humor writing in his introduction to *Humor from Harper's* is accompanied by the premise (implicit to the anthological format) that *Harper's* humor has a history worthy of reproduction, and by his explicit claim that "the editors of *Harper's* have always tried, even in the genteel years of the nineteenth century, to publish humor that says something worth saying – about the shape of our culture, the zany habits of people presumed to be sane, the stuffed shirts which yearn for puncturing" (xiv). More importantly for my unfulfilled archival expectations, the current, long-standing, highly respected editor, Lewis H. Lapham, recently edited a huge, heavy, illustrated memorial volume magnificently titled *An American Album: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Harper's Magazine*. Published by the "Franklin Square Press," and accompanied by a short forward in which Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. makes the dramatic, accurate claim that the magazine has "helped to shape the American literary landscape for two thirds of the life of the republic" [viii], this printed celebration purports to anthologize for posterity the *Harper's* tradition of incisive and creative intellectual fare. Lapham announces in his introduction, "Hazards of New Fortune," the magazine's status as a national institution and proclaims his earnest study of the magazine's history. He concludes the piece with the bold declaration that the magazine would continue to do "as the four brothers Harper long ago intended, [to increase] the common stores of energy and hope" (xxxi). Such pride in the past, however, drastically differs from the offices on Broadway, which are almost entirely evacuated of the records, desks and stuffed chairs of elite literary history. Was it all an elaborate con, with "history" put forward as the currency of contemporary relevance, as the form of *Harper's* resources most ready for profitable conversion into cultural capital? Was *Harper's* selling –gasp – history by the yard?

Yes.

I do not reply positively to these otherwise rhetorical questions to condemn Lapham and the new *Harper's* fortunes for crass commercialization of hallowed U.S. literary history. Indeed, the magazine's reduced circumstances and pared down interior decorations index the very real difficulties faced by twenty-first century magazines everywhere. Instead, I see the latest *Harper's* draw on the history bank as entirely in line with the story I am trying to tell about magazines, literature, and humor, a story that emphasizes the pivotal institutional history of literary production. What remains as true for today's *Harper's* as for its 1890s counterpart is its effort to maintain cultural capital (manifested in its elite, nationally important status) while producing work out of what in 1894 James L. Ford called the "Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry." In imagining *Harper's* current efforts at self-promotion as a sale of history by the yard, then, I mean to summon up Loomis's "Dialect Store" fantasy in all its complex contradictoriness, with its high-handed, humorous derision of commodified literature and its latent, comic desire for smooth and profitable literary production evacuated of labor and easily converted into economic and cultural capital.

Linking the histories of the Harper's publishing house,[1] its flagship magazine, and its famous humor department to the entirely interimplicated histories of U.S. literary production and the late nineteenth-century humor industry, this chapter tells the story of two *Harper's*, one a bastion of genteel literary virtues bearing virtually no relation to advertising, humor, or the marketplace, and the other a grim capitalist institution that determined the value of literary quality by the standards of economic profit. My effort will be to stress that the elite house's seemingly surprising participation in the humor industry, a partnership often sidelined by grand narratives of editorial acumen and literary achievement, is surprising only insofar as the magazine's self-fashioned images have taken hold and remained durable. As Nancy Glazener notes in her history of nineteenth-century elite U.S. magazines, quality magazines and their distinguished editors took care to figure themselves as benevolent mediators standing, gently, between artistically motivated, helpless writers and the crass real world of literary consumption. Such self-fashioning, however, was always accompanied by another history in which these mediating figureheads were seen as dictatorial directors of literary production, publishing almost exclusively according to the ruthless and common demands of profit. The magazine's engagement with the humor industry sets in stark relief the contrast between one *Harper's* and the other.

In the stories I tell below, drawn from Eugene Exman's and J. Henry Harper's official house histories and from James L. Ford's humorous, satirical indictment of late-nineteenth-century magazine editing, I take up *Harper's* dual status as idealistic literary arbiter and avaricious literary purveyor. I do so in order to historicize how the relations between literature and the marketplace were imagined in the 1890s and how they have continued to be imagined in the twenty-first century. My goal, however, is not to shift the emphasis away from pure literary standards and elite class fantasies in order to privilege mass production, affect, and economic exchange as keys to the "real" history hidden by self-serving house narratives. While purposely participating in a dialogue with American Studies investigations of nineteenth-century U.S. writing that detail the role of the marketplace in literary production, I do not want to privilege one fantasy of production over another. Instead, I want to highlight the longevity of both narratives and assert their intimate relations rather than their obvious differences. My history adds to American Studies, and to print history in general, a richer sense of the durability of this dualistic discourse of literary production, consumption and evaluation, through which readers, writers and editors alike imagine the close relations between writing and the marketplace.

To register the impact of this duality, which manifests itself in Lapham-like fantasies of pure literary endeavor and in Loomis-like fantasies of infinite, effortless literary production, I point to the humor department's role in nineteenth century elite magazines, and stress humor's often literally marginal but never actually exceptional place in the history of literary production. Humor's role, I argue, points to the ideology shared by both sides of the oppositional duality that supposedly characterizes the two *Harper's*. In this shared belief system that manages and renders obscure the basic relations of capitalism, fantasies of pure literary endeavor *and* literary corruption by the marketplace *both* assume literature's relation to capital as exceptional and regrettable. My point is not that the "real" literary history of nineteenth century literary production lies somewhere "in between" the elite fantasy and the financial reality but instead that discourses of literary production in the nineteenth century operated on the basis of such an imagined duality. Institutions like *Harper's* sought to merge the interests of capitalism and literature by articulating a radical difference between literary quality and capital, and their efforts to coin humor, intimately linked to their efforts to advertise, suggest the fractured ways in which that convergence came to be a part of mass culture.

All in the Family

My naïve, anachronistic expectations of distinguished Franklin Square desks and records at the *Harper's* offices were derived from the rich family-oriented discourse through which the nineteenth-century publishing firm and its flagship magazine sold themselves. As June Howard notes in her excellent history of the Harper's publishing house, "the interest in the interior arrangements at Franklin Square.... [captured by] magazine departments titled 'The Editor's Study' and 'The Editor's Easy Chair'.... direct our attention to the relentlessly domestic imagery of the House of Harper" (77). Such furniture-driven self-fashioning had its own history in U.S. magazine production, going back at least to Nathaniel Parker Willis' editorial department at *The American Magazine* entitled "The Editor's Table," which often focused on the furniture of his studio garret (Hendler 157) and Lewis Gaylord Clark's humor department "The Editor's Table" at the *Knickerbocker Magazine* from which the "Editor's Drawer" later derived (Francis Bangs 99), although these deployments of domestic imagery often connoted an intimate glimpse into a bachelor's rooms more than a polite look at the family's hearth. This latter connection between furnishings, literary production and *Harper's* lasted at least until the 1920s when, after the "Drawer" department was abandoned, the literal desk from which it derived was "kept as an honored link to [the] past" (Exman 258). This tradition emphasized, as Howard trenchantly observes, the publishing house's effort to manage and sell itself through real family ties and through domestic imagery and ideology. As my reasoning went upon my trip to New York, if *Harper's* was still selling history, then perhaps it was still memorializing furniture.

The traditional Harper's House version of its nineteenth-century family history is worth summarizing for its value as an index to the institution's operation and because the house actually promoted (and still promotes) itself through such narratives. In fact, claims to domestic security and bliss drove almost every aspect of Harper's business in the nineteenth century, from the company's actual business ownership to its selection of literature to its carefully managed self-image. Since the people who occupied the famous

Harper's furniture stood between publication and literary oblivion, their interests and tastes profoundly impacted nineteenth-century U.S. literary taste and production. Their stories are therefore worth telling, even if I accompany them with a scholarly raised eyebrow. Later, I will tell alternate histories to those sanctioned by the House of Harper, histories that confirm by contrast the Harper family's profound influence on American literature, their merging of the interests of capital and literature, and their deep investment in the nineteenth-century humor industry. For now, it's worth presenting the more conventional family business narrative that, without entirely ignoring the profit motive, certainly favors its supposed opposite, the literary quality motive. In the official Harper's versions of elite literary history, literary quality always wins over capital quantity.

The Harper's publishing house opened for business in 1817 when two ambitious young men, James and John Harper, soon to be followed by brothers Wesley and Fletcher, decided to throw their lot in with the 33 booksellers, many of whom were also publishers, operating at the time in New York. By the end of the 1820s the Harper house was the largest book-printing company in the United States, and by the end of the 1830s its success was even greater, due in part to the house's dedication to industrial innovation. For instance, the Harpers were the first book publishers to regularly stereotype their works, manufacturing from type permanent plates that, while expensive to make, were easy to store and freed up type for greater use (Exman *House* 10). Harper's early success was also due at least in part to Fletcher's shrewd management of the publishing division. Described by house historian Eugene Exman as "ambitious and extroverted and humorous" (7), Fletcher was in many ways an ideal champion for the Harper's profitable and piratical battles for reprinting English books which were unprotected by official international copyright law until 1891. Indeed, as Exman notes with only slight exaggeration, "the most significant fact about American book publishing in the nineteenth century was that the rights of English and American authors were unprotected in each other's countries" (48). The lack of such law was enough for the earnest, protestant, facial-haired patriarchs to pilfer to their heart's content, happily (for them) driving "the cost of publishing downward to the cost of printing" (Whalen 106). It is true that the Harpers were less ruthless and more generous than some of their competitors, but nonetheless this family was also in it for the money and only indirectly, as Lapham and some others have implied, for the improvement of a "culture" and literature in the United States imagined as separate from the interests of capital.[2]

Staying on top (or even afloat) as U.S. book publishers in the middle of the nineteenth century, while not always a pleasant task, was certainly exciting. These dynamic conditions were partly determined by the relative lack of sophisticated legislation in the field of literary publication. One battle in an 1840s publishing "war" recorded by Exman captures this hectic climate: in June of 1842, a *New World* employee gained access to the Harper premises and stole a copy of a novel by G.P.R James the brothers were in the process of publishing. The burglar also set a fire that destroyed all bound stock. A considerable insurance policy enabled the Harpers to rebuild and to retaliate by producing cheap fiction sold at a loss (24-26). Such underhanded efforts certainly made things hot for the brothers, but the "mammoth weeklies" like the *New World* that were issuing fiction at very low prices underestimated the Harpers, for while fully embracing sabotage and theft the rivals failed to take advantage of business' other partner, politics. Within a year, things looked very different for Harper's competition, because of "the April, 1843, directive from the Post Office Department that the mammoth sheets should pay postage at book rates. That action, perhaps helped along by Fletcher Harper's taking a trip to Washington, soon killed off the newspaper competition" (26). What Exman quickly glosses looms large over the history of Harper's success: that is, the house's close relationship to municipal and federal politics and its capacity to influence lawmaking for the benefit of Harper's profit over that of the reading public.

In fact, political history all over the United States bears traces of the efforts of Franklin Square's first family. As Lapham proudly notes, these "frugal merchants and devout, side-whiskered Methodists," who by 1850 ran a publishing concern that was "the largest in the world," were far more than the gentle fathers of American literary standards (xii). For instance, in 1844, James was elected mayor of New York. He even "equipped the police with their first uniforms – notable for the copper buttons that gave currency to the term 'cops'" (xii). A second-generation Harper brother, known as "Brooklyn Joe" to his kin, clearly carried on this tradition of political influence, so that one commentator in 1877 noted "it must be remembered that so far as any influence upon Congress is concerned, the little finger of Mr. Harper is thicker than the loins of all the literary and scientific men in the United States put together" (qtd. in Howard 79).[3]

With politics as an occasional ally, the Harpers by 1854 were influential enough that Henry David Thoreau, in *Walden*, complained that the brothers literally selected what most Americans read (Exman 11). The actual identity of these brothers was, in keeping with the house's "family" image, collective: as one Harper wrote, "a gentleman once asked James the natural question: 'Which of you is the Harper and which are the

Brothers?' 'Either one is the Harper,' was the reply, 'and the rest are the Brothers'" (qtd. in Howard 68). Such apparent familial bliss is the very stuff of Harper's marketing strategies, from its furniture-saturated anecdotes to the family depicted on the title pages of its 1847 and 1848 catalogues to its Family Library of 1830 to its "admonition to Thomas Hardy in 1894 that *Harper's Magazine* must contain nothing which could not be read aloud in a family circle" (Exman 31). The functioning of the capitalist institution was, according to these images and anecdotes, reassuringly homologous to the functioning of the family institution. Such idealized representations, as much as they reflected actual Harper's practices and beliefs, were also efforts to increase Harper's circulation among a readership imagined as valuing sentimental, genteel, conservative, domestic ideals.[4]

Like even the most successful principles of business organization and marketing, however, Harper's trenchantly managed familial promotional image and institutional structure suffered under the dynamic demands of business. Traditional dedication to a particularly Harper's notion of the genteel family's participation in business produced at the end of the nineteenth century pleasant nostalgia for the established publishing house's old-fashioned practices but also bankruptcy for the company and takeover by outsiders. If any one was the Harper and the rest Brothers, as James asserted, then all members of subsequent generations demanded an equal share in the company's economic and cultural capital, if not its workload. Exman titles his chapter dealing with the 1890s "The Tragic End of a Long Story," and ascribes the house's failure to the nationwide economic collapse of 1893 and to the "undiminished zeal" of the incautious descendants of the four brothers who had not managed to establish funds to cover the immense capital withdrawals occasioned by retiring and dying second-generation Harpers (171). The misguided "zeal" Exman relates as a factor in Harper's demise probably had more to do with the desire to take money from the house than to work to build it up. Francis Hyde Bangs, son of "Drawer" editor John Kendrick Bangs, records the family business's demise in a more critical form, probably because his father really did suffer from the profound institutional changes that resulted from the house's failure:

> The failure of the House of Harper which necessitated its reorganization in 1900 was largely the result of its being a family business. Five sons of the original Harper brothers had entered the firm in 1869 and eleven grandsons subsequently fastened themselves upon the institution. It was the policy of the Harper family to pay their progeny good salaries and leave them to their own devices. Some of them devoted their minds to buying ink or paper or mucilage at salaries running into five figures, and some of them, apparently, called once a month to receive "the blessings of the firm in timely cheques." It was impossible, said James L. Ford, for J. Henry Harper, the one dominant spirit in the management of the business, "to tell his great uncle to 'step lively' uptown with those electrotypes, or maintain tribal authority and discipline in the office." The business became impaired. Finally it was decided to turn over the property to Colonel George Harvey for readjustment. This was done with the approval of J. Pierpont Morgan, who had a large mortgage on the property and who was ready to make it even larger with such an enterprising journalist and manager as Harvey in control. (207-08)

As Bangs's account makes clear, second- or third-generation Harpers were more likely to pursue genteel amusement than the austere satisfaction of hard work. This meant that they were more interested in cashing cheques to pursue their privileged lifestyle than in working hard at the firm, a lesson they perhaps learned from the snooty gentility and naïve sense of security promoted by quality magazines like their own *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.

Whatever the causes of the house's fall, its family-oriented image and business practices were simply not adequately profitable at the end of the nineteenth century. An emotional and financial catastrophe for many writers and editors, the failure of the House was suitably mourned by Howells when he wrote upon hearing of the demise, "it was as if I had read the government of the United States had failed" (qtd. in Exman 183). This sentiment was similar to that of J. P. Morgan, who once noted, "the downfall of the House of Harper would be a national calamity" (qtd. in Lapham xiv). In the twenty-first century, Lapham too would draw on this reputation for national importance, selecting from Harper family history such tales as added historical heft to his little publication, but in the heady days of 1890s business, "history" and "national importance" were simply not sufficiently profitable assets to carry the world-famous publishing house, even if it was enough to save the nation's foremost literary organ from oblivion.

Harper's Armchair Grip

Before *Harper's Magazine* sold history to sell itself, it sold reprinted English and U.S. writing to sell Harper's Brothers books. Rather than only intending to nobly pursue the increase of "common stores of energy and hope," an early Harper's declaration that Lapham dramatically cites to link the magazine's present to its past, the magazine was always primarily concerned with selling books to increase Harper Brothers capital. As James Playsted Wood notes in his insider overview of the U.S. magazine industry, "an important consideration with Harper & Brothers, the book publishers, in founding the eclectic magazine was that it would serve as an advertising medium for their books" (73). Lapham candidly cites this history (alongside claims for increasing common stores of hope), writing that "the Harper brothers conceived of their new magazine as a commercial opportunity and 'a tender to our business,' meant to drum up buyers for their books and occupy the downtime on the expensive steam presses newly installed in their factory on Franklin Square" (Lapham xii). The magazine, later to direct elite literary culture, in its early days merely converted empty publishing time into the opportunity for advertising their publishing concern and participating in the established but still emerging U.S. market for cheap, ephemerally bound fiction. Having achieved a circulation of as high as 200,000 by the beginning of the Civil War (Reed 50), *Harper's* was one of the most widely read magazines in the country until and even after the 1893 magazine revolution.

Glazener expands on the historical significance of the Harper house's magazine-as-advertisement strategy, writing that "the success of *Harper's* had first demonstrated how valuable a flagship magazine [or 'house organ'] could be to a publishing house. Setting the pattern for many other magazines in the latter half of the nineteenth century, *Harper's* promoted Harper Brothers' books in a number of ways: straightforwardly, by advertising them; and indirectly, by serializing or excerpting them and by reviewing them" (Glazener 25-26). This history of *Harper's* suggests that the 1893 magazine revolution that shifted magazine income from subscription prices to advertising was not quite so revolutionary as many claim, since the 1850 *Harper's* innovation itself relied on advertising as a prime source of income for its publisher owners, even if self-advertising cannot be simply equated with mass advertising.[5] The 1893 revolution dramatically increased circulation and decreased cover price, but as a new play on advertising revenue it followed in the footsteps of its 1850 equivalent which had "marked the beginning of a new era" of its own (Reed 50). I want to encourage a shift from thinking of *Harper's* as a literary institution interested in publishing the "best" fiction for the "best" people to an equally available conception of the magazine as an advertising medium. This change sets in relief the relations between elite literary tastes and the literary marketplace even as it pinpoints a key aspect of magazine literature's dual status as art and as advertising.

This shift in context for telling *Harper's* history carries important implications for all accounts of the magazine's operation in the nineteenth century, and especially of the magazine's relationship to the emerging advertising industry. Typically, magazine histories emphasize the Harper's famous reluctance to print advertising in their flagship magazine up until the 1880s, followed by their equally famous industry-leading dedication to publishing advertising by the mid-1890s. Wood refers to this common tale, writing that "for some years Harper's spurned all advertising except for books published by the house. In the early 1870's Fletcher Harper indignantly refused an offer of $18,000 a year for use of the last page by the Howe Sewing Machine Company, but twenty years later *Harper's* led all the other magazines in advertising volume" (307).[6] It is possible that the Harper Brothers did indeed, as Arthur John notes, assert that "any display other than book notices lowered the dignity of a literary monthly" (qtd. in Reed 57), but what seems far more to the point is the likely belief on their part that any advertisements for products *other than those of the Harper's publishing company* would lower their profits. What I want to emphasize is not the Harpers' avaricious concern for their magazine's dignity – though certainly this was as important a selling point for the nineteenth-century *Harper's* as history is for the twenty-first-century *Harper's* – but instead that the magazine was *always* dedicated to advertising. Page counts that track percentages of advertising material and editorial material, helpful though they are for gauging real changes in magazine editorial policy, sometimes inadvertently participate in the magazine's own fantasies about dignity and literary stewardship (which are themselves distinctive signatures, or trademarks, in the marketplace) since in actual fact – and this is true for all profit-minded magazines – 100% of the pages are dedicated to or heavily related to advertising. Shifts in policy regarding outside advertising content, which I do discuss below, are certainly important moments in the magazine's history, but, though dramatic and indicative of shifts to modern forms of mass culture, they are better understood as tactical reconsiderations of the relations between cultural and economic capital than as strategic reversals. My point here is not to "reduce" the magazine to advertising but to stress the inextricability of the magazine's advertising function and its literary content.

In the 1890s, outside advertising (as opposed to what we might call implicit or self-directed advertising) increasingly took hold of the magazine industry, and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, official supercilious disdain notwithstanding, was no exception to this tendency. Indeed, the quality magazine, which had traditionally eschewed advertising products other than its own (a policy often misinterpreted as a principled, cultured aversion to advertising rather than an effort to *consolidate* the house's own advertising), became a leader in the field of publishing outside advertising matter alongside traditional editorial material. Average outside advertising pages per *Harper's* issue increased from seven pages in 1882-85 to 85 pages in 1891-95 to 92 pages in 1896-1900 (Sherman cited in Ohmann 84), such that by the late 1890s *Harper's* was an industry leader in this category, in one 1899 issue carrying 135 pages of advertising to 163 pages of what is traditionally identified as editorial material (Wood 307). The readership of *Harper's* prior to 1890 was one of the highest (and often *the* highest) in the country; and while after the magazine revolution its readership was not as staggering as the millions claimed by ten-cent mass magazines, its readers were still perceived as dedicated to, or sympathetic with, the conspicuous, dramatic consuming practices of wealthy, upper class Americans. Advertisers were as eager to reach this potentially lucrative audience as *Harper's* was to secure lucrative advertising contracts.

Although the magazine was subject to some shifts in editorial procedures, such as the decision to include an ever larger outside advertising section, the magazine secured much of its relatively large, predictable readership through editorial consistency, always delivering the distinctive product its readers (and, later, its outside advertisers) desired. As Reed notes, the late-nineteenth-century *Harper's* maintained

> its own quite distinctive editorial profile. *Harper's* interest in fiction and articles about travel and adventure was still a dominant one, even if it had diminished from its peak of ten years before to a figure of about 54%. As it had possessed the same editor since 1869, Henry Mills Alden, this is hardly surprising. The

> regular use of Laurence Hutton to write the four pages of 'Literary Notes' each month, when combined with the similarly critical 'Editor's Study', bolstered the apparent commitment to literary analysis without any major features in the front of the magazine. The series headed 'Editor's Drawer' also bolstered the amount of page space used by 'Humor and Entertainment', a light-hearted vein that was almost entirely absent from the *Century* [with the exception of that publication's humor department, "In Lighter Vein"]. Another subject that had began to appear in the older publication was the theater; again, absent from the *Century*. Topics such as the arts, science and technology and public affairs were hardly featured, again in contrast to the *Century*. Neither bothered to describe or discuss anything to do with religion, fashion, or domestic arrangements.... Overall, the tone of *Harper's* resembles the grip of a comfortable armchair. (58)

Reed's emphasis on the magazine's armchair grip is conventional and accurate, although it mistakenly participates in the imagined separation of editorial material and advertising matter that occupied space between the same two covers. This is especially surprising since Reed himself judgmentally notes that *Harper's* "sandwiched" advertisements for various and sundry products in the pages of its literary notices (themselves advertisements) "like a rather nasty piece of baloney" (57). Again, literature's dual existence appears in this compound image – on the one hand, *Harper's* as the genteel purveyor of family fireside quality writing, and on the other, *Harper's* as the ruthless profit-oriented endeavor interested in the bottom line. Appropriately, this dual existence is accompanied by the reference to baloney, a cliched trope of bad consumption. Reed's belief that advertisements are like baloney is a precise measure of the success of *Harper's* own efforts to advocate for its own dual existence: the articles are the magazine, and the ads are baloney, even if the ads are printed in between the magazine's covers.

It is important to note here, too, that this kind of trope came to structure most critiques of mass culture in the twentieth century – suggesting the extent to which critiques of mass culture are often shaped to serve the interests of mass culture and accounting for the fact that mass culture is so good at critiquing itself and at selling that critique. This dual existence constitutes perceptions of the magazine from its initial offering in June of 1850, since commentators from the Harpers to Exman to Reed to Lapham all entertain the notion that when they hold a *Harper's* they are not holding one publication but two, the genteel purveyor of literary quality and the rough purveyor of advertising matter. From passage to passage and anecdote to anecdote, the "character" of the magazine shifts from the aesthetic to the economic, but only rarely do the twain meet – and when they do, their union only underscores the ambivalent relation between the two *Harper's* that support the magazine's durable place in U.S. literary culture. That is, the double life of the magazine grants it cultural resonance (in addition to financial and institutional support and reverent house histories): *Harper's* own complicity in the marketplace in the one instance sets in relief and makes more pleasurable its genteel commitment to great art in the next. The occasional disavowal by Harper's advocates of the company's complicity in capital is thus part of a wider discourse where the same advocates will occasionally, anecdotally, describe the house's effort to secure economic capital through publishing. The disavowals, then, are only part of a wider game that in reality needs both versions, both lives of Harper's to sustain its claim on economic and cultural capital. Lapham, to some extent, captures this double life in an apt metaphor that links quality writing to the stuff of mining, noting that "by 1895 Alden's magazine and the publishing house of Harper & Brothers passed as synonyms for the highest grades of American literary ore" (xviii - xix). While Lapham's metaphor is not meant to resound doubly, pointing to literature as "pure gold" and as something that needs to be laboriously mined, the trope neatly indexes the quality magazine's role in managing relations between literature and capital.

Capital Readers

The sense of the magazine as two things at once, as ethereally separate from worldly self-interest and as inescapably tied to capital, is embodied in the imposing figure of the magazine editor. Alternately figured as the genteel hero battling for high, true literary standards and as the uncouth ogre stifling creativity in the interests of selling at a profit to the lowest common denominator, this working reader strove to secure capital for the institution through the manufacture and cultivation of particular reading and writing practices. Terence Whalen captures the editor's dual approach to work through his concept of the virtual "Capital Reader," an oxymoronic mediating figure who, in Whalen's account of Edgar Allen Poe's authorial career, manages literary production in capitalist marketplaces. What Whalen's history of the relations between literature and the marketplace in Poe's moment emphasizes is how completely intertwined writing and money became as the discourse of their mutual incompatibility grew in earnest.[7]

Whalen's account of the emergence of the Capital Reader in U.S. letters begins in the experience of Poe as he navigated through a changing literary marketplace. As

Whalen relates the tale, when Poe contacted Harper and Brothers in 1836 regarding the publication of a book, he became acutely aware that "every commercial writer – whether genius or hack" – wrote for three different "virtual" readers (Whalen 9). These included the "Ideal Reader" who could distinguish between literary wheat and chaff, the "Feared Reader" who, as a member of the collective "masses," read according to the tastes of the unruly, unpredictable "mob," and the "Capital Reader," "who acted as the embodiment of capital itself" (9-10). This last reader mediated between the author and the audience by selecting that which firms published and rejected. This "mediating entity in its most menacing form," reading for profitability alone, "wielded absolute power over publication" (10) and mediated "all relations between the commercial writer and the mass audience" (271). As Whalen notes, and as I recount below, such mediation came to influence not only how literature was selected and edited, but also how it was written and how it was evaluated. This point is key: the Capital Reader influences literary production at all levels, from actual creation to editorial selection to editorial revision to review.[8] In this sense, the Capital Reader is a mediating figure who stands between writing and publication, influencing every process of production, literally contributing to pieces through deletion, addition, restructuring, and influence.

Whalen's point is that the Capital Reader, for Poe and for others writing for the antebellum publishing industry, was a *virtual* figure who embodied the determining force of capital and who can tell us a lot about the structural dynamics of capital emergent in the antebellum publishing industry. Thus while the individual embodiment of the editor figure has considerable power, that power pales in comparison to the power of capital: "the Capital Reader need not be construed as a specific biological or legal entity, but instead as a personification of the peculiar logic that accompanied the new publishing industry" (10). I think it's still useful, however, to keep his sense of the determining force of the figure of the capital reader in mind when we think about the literal editors whom writers often knew personally or by reputation. That is, I think embodiments of the Capital Reader are an important part of the story, and that we can talk about these figures without occluding the force of capital Whalen identifies. I should make clear that in Whalen's sense, "Capital Reader" names a relation, not a person. I mean to deploy the term in a different, double sense, as the naming of a relation that cannot be reduced to the tastes or actions of any individual reader at a house, and as the naming of an actual reader at an actual house whose tastes were sometimes known, and even notorious. The danger in my double deployment of the term is that it may imply that Capital Readers have total power, when instead, like authors they edited, they were caught up in an institutional, capitalist logic. But the virtue of my approach is that it leaves room to conceive and track capital reading *as a practice* in history, as a coining. My effort, then, is not to say that capital gets its power from individual persons (if you took away these particular capital readers, they would simply be replaced), but to see how Whalen's concept of a virtual Capital Reader can include a literal one. So, while the sense of the Capital Reader as a virtual figure of menace needs to be maintained, the concept of the Capital Reader might be nuanced if we mean to apply it to a real person working at a real company making concrete decisions according to official standards whose effects and power are material and not virtual. Needless to say, Harper's Capital Readers, who really did "embody capital itself," applied huge pressure to what was written and what was published in nineteenth-century books and magazines.

J. Henry Harper, in his reminiscence *The House of Harper*, records an official description of Harper house directives to and from what I will call their actual "Capital Readers." The account is meant to stand in for the company's policies throughout the nineteenth century:

> In 1886 Laurence Hutton became one of our readers, and we sent him the following memorandum:
>
> My attention has just been called to a passage in a letter written some time ago by a member of the firm regarding points to be kept in view by H. & B.'s readers. It will be a cue for you, and I send you a copy of it:
>
> "I hope they will be sound on novels and not *too easy*. Stupidity and vulgarity, I think, they will quickly recognize – and I hope they will keep their eyes open to detect the atheistic or agnostic element which nowadays pervades so many stories. We should be wicked if we knowingly disseminated such books – and we should be unmindful of the traditions of our House if we did not carefully seek to exclude from all our periodicals, etc., any form of literature, however brilliant, which either openly attacks or merely sneers at the Christian religion." (548)

In this important document, a relevance underscored by the fact that Hutton wrote the *Harper's* influential "Literary Notes" department for over a decade, Harper's announces to its employee the company's firm devotion to the moral tradition of its founders that is of course evident in almost all that was published by the firm in the nineteenth century. Whalen refuses to include such issues in his account of the Capital Reader, noting that capital reading does not concern issues of "propriety and morality" but rather "a deep connection between gross economic forces and the creative activity of literary producers"

(10). But in the case of this letter, I maintain, issues of morality cannot be disarticulated from the practice of capital reading at Harper's. This explains in part why J. Henry chooses to remember in his tribute, with one eye on history and another on posterity, only those attributes he thinks best represent what the company contributed to the nation. That he would select such negative directions as emblematic of the company's attitudes (almost every single directive cited above is about what should *not* be accepted) suggests more than any fact or figure the Harper house's assumed hegemony over literary production (the "normal" or good does not need to be delineated – only deviations from the norm).

This Capital Letter also captures the House's ambivalent attitude to readers in the nineteenth century: while the claim of some historians that the House virtually ignored any issues of readership is clearly inaccurate, nonetheless this directive does make clear that Harper's assumed qualities in its readers rather than establishing such qualities as fact. Perhaps, however, such assumptions were part of a complex business strategy, since even a quality house like Harper's, readership was still under construction and subject to directions provided by the house. Assuming readers to be certain kinds of people was perhaps an efficient part of a process for assuring the manufacture of such people. An employee of the house, Charles Nordhoff, working as author and reader, "early learned that the guiding principle was to establish what would be intelligible, interesting, and useful to the average American" (Exman 77). The assumption of an "average American" is not as vague as it perhaps seems, since Nordhoff believed that Fletcher "made few mistakes about his public because he created it" (77). The "average American" here is not so much an actual person as a governing definition the House had of its market.[9]

Hardy's famous interchange with the Harper's establishment over *Jude the Obscure*, in which the house insisted Hardy's serialized novel be appropriate for the family circle, speaks to the continuity of the company's publishing practices. Worried that Hardy might transgress imposed boundaries of decorum, the Harpers noted that "they must be assured [*Jude*] would be suitable for a family magazine. Hardy replied that the most fastidious maiden could not be offended" (Exman 67). William Dean Howells, a very prolific contributor to the house on a number of levels and one of its own Capital Readers, was told in similar fashion that in writing a monthly department for the house's flagship magazine "he would be given freedom to write.... as he chose, although he should watch out for whatever 'rang a little bell.' Howells understood what [was] meant: the little bell would tinkle when such subjects as women's suffrage or capital punishment begged for discussion; the Harpers were not reformers enough to advance positions on such issues" (154). The negative directives for Hutton, Hardy and Howells, delivered via images of tinkling bells, suggest the vast pressure Capital Reading practices, which I believe cannot be disarticulated from issues of morality (insofar as institutions like Harper's understood conformity to a certain kind of moral behavior an important part of accruing capital), exerted on nineteenth-century writing.

The sense of Harper's publishing as two things at once, manifested in the figure of the Capital Reader, is registered in mystifying representations of *Harper's* most prolific editor, Henry Mills Alden. This Capital Reader, at least in the nineteenth century, was notoriously single-minded, a consistency helped along by the fact that he served as chief editor from 1869 to 1919, and registered in the Capital Letter described above in which issues of morality cannot be disarticulated from Capital Reading. The other side is just as striking: the magazine once ran a picture of Alden doing his job as Capital Reader, a picture reprinted in Exman's house history and in Lapham's "Hazards of New Fortune" essay (see figure 4), that admirably captures the impression elite magazines promoted (and still promote) of their editorial strategy. Rather than giving editorial directives motivated by capital reading practices, Alden, head bent in gentle, sympathetic, determined refusal, generously dispenses "editorial counsel" to a prospective woman contributor. Practically buried under the weight of stacks and stacks of paper, the Alden of this illustration toils patiently, selecting only the best and even stooping to encourage the worst.[10] Powerfully at odds with Whalen's Capital Reader, and the Alden remembered by some *Harper's* authors (see the discussion of James L. Ford's humorous account below), the gentle Alden of this illustration represents the House's extreme, idealized version of literary labor at their flagship magazine.

Harper's and the Bangs Entertainment Co.

The title of the *Harper's* humor department, the "Editor's Drawer," which began back in 1851 just after the magazine's first full year of publication, calls attention to the same carefully managed aura that gave the magazine its profitable feeling of an "armchair grip" and allowed the magazine to figure Alden as the gentle literary mediator dedicated to printing only the best; it's also part of what encouraged visions of mahogany in my head during my trip to New York in 2003. The "Drawer's" status as a "department," however, also registers the magazine's other life, since "department" refers not only to a place where people work but also to a place where people sell. As Ohmann notes in

Selling Culture (and as Loomis stresses in his story), departments can be the rationalized sections of department stores as well as office-style places of work. Indeed, since the word magazine actually comes from the French for "store," magazines, especially those of the nineteenth century that stressed the term "department" to describe their regular sections of editorial material, should be understood at least in part as small, printed "department stores" (Ohmann 223). Like those sales sites emerging in the late nineteenth century, magazines used numerous departments "to attract the greatest number of readers" (225), including "an astonishing potpourri of material, but organized explicitly and tacitly into categories that implied the diversity and individuality of taste among the readership, offering each member of the family something for his or her special pleasure or need," and thereby "positioning the reader as a free-choosing, individual consumer" (225). The "Drawer," then, needs to be understood as both a place for selling and a place of delight, a joke store or repository and a piece of distinguished Harper's furniture, modern like a department store but bearing its own rich history of converting paper into pleasure and pleasure into profit. The Drawer also needs to be understood as a place of work, a sense that is occluded by the Harper memoir and emphasized by the Bangs memoir I cite below. The differences in emphasis between the memoirs, one written by a Harper and one by the son of the Drawer's editor and most prolific contributor, embody the convoluted ways cultural producers (including owners, managers, and writers) tried to imagine the vexed place of labor in the culture industry.

Official Harper's reminiscences, which generally mean to stress the house's and magazine's genteel, familial roots, mention only briefly the humor department's instrumental function. J. Henry Harper, in his own *House of Harper*, records the

"Drawer's" gentlemanly and remunerative origins in a long passage worth quoting for its idealized representation of magazine writing:

> The gatherings at my grandfather's Monday dinners, which were a feature in his city home during my boyhood, were made up of [distinguished raconteurs]. Dr. S. Iranaeus Prime [editor of the *New York Observer*], Dr. Milburn, Dr. Durbin, Dr. McClintock, Dr. Crooks, Dr. Hagany, and many others were considered among the best raconteurs of the day. Stories circulated in rapid succession from the time they sat down to dinner until the meal was over and the second round of cigars had been lighted and consumed. The stories were as a rule original, either the personal experiences of one fresh from an Eastern circuit, or those just brought to town by some new arrival from the West. Full of pulsating life they were, and illustrative of their earnest labors throughout the land. The Drawer of *Harper's Magazine* was the outcome of these gatherings, and when an especially good anecdote was told my grandfather would ask the narrator to write it out and put it in the drawer of his desk at the office, from which custom the department derived its name. These stories were gathered up once a month by the editor and worked into the department. Dr. S. Irenaeus Prime was the second editor of the Drawer, which he conducted most successfully for many years. (34-35)

J. Henry's official memory draws the genteel, private, domestic imagery so key to Harper's self-fashioning into the magazine's department store rationale. Here, the origins of the ephemeral, silly Drawer are marked as professional and elite by all of those "Drs" accompanying generally forgotten surnames. The history of *Harper's* production, too, is evacuated of any fiction-factory feel by the implication that departments are created and written over easy, satisfying tobacco consumption, elite raconteuring, and casual, informal modes of submission and editing.[11] In fact, in this ideal memory, there is almost no writing to speak of at all (a meaningful correlation with Loomis's dream of a dialect store that sells words, manufactured elsewhere by the yard). J. Henry does take time to note, however, that after Prime began editing the Drawer, sometimes publishing "contributions [received] by mail," "Fletcher subsequently told him that they were satisfied that the Drawer, under his management, sold more copies than any one feature in the Magazine" (35).[12] Here we see again the presence of the crass *Harper's* that measures sales propping up, or confirming by contrast, the genteel *Harper's* that records gentlemen's anecdotes of travel.

In the 1890s, the Capital Reader of most consequence at the Drawer department was the popular, best-selling professional humorist, John Kendrick Bangs. A career humorist who first achieved notoriety writing for an undergraduate paper at Columbia University, and who later made money as an after-dinner speaker (or paid, professional raconteur), Bangs in the 1890s was perhaps the best representative of a generally forgotten humor industry figure, the genteel humorist. Dedicated, in part at least because of his position at Harper's, to championing elite literary and social values, Bangs strove to keep things neat and clean while serving as the Harper's house humorist. The story of his position at the house and his editing practices reveals the intimate links that obtained in the late nineteenth century between elite and popular literary production and the vibrant humor industry. While books like *Humor from Harper's* explicitly sideline 1890s Harper's humor as exceptional to the magazine's history, Bangs's role at the house and the magazine suggests that the hired humorist plays a more significant role in the history of U.S. literary production.

At Columbia, Bangs wrote for the undergraduate periodical *Acta Columbiana* and became known as "the Great Collegiate Vituperator" (Francis Bangs 36). By the time he graduated around 1883, he was writing for *Life* magazine, an important U.S. comic weekly, eventually serving as its literary editor from 1884 to 1888 (Bangs 60-61). Like many professional humorists even today, Bangs was extremely prolific throughout his entire career, moving from job to job and scheme to scheme in an effort to make money and secure what literary repute he could. In 1888-89 he conducted a humor column called "Spotlets" at the *New York Evening Sun* and was soon offered, by Alden himself, the chance "to take charge of [*Harper's*] humorous department, 'The Editor's Drawer,' and also of the 'Facetiae' page of *Harper's Bazar*" (Bangs 99). Soon, Bangs was also the primary humor contributor to *Harper's Weekly* and humor editor for *Harper's Young People*. Control of the Harper's humor quadrivium clearly ranked him as house humorist, and consequently made him one of the humor industry's most visible and influential producers for the decade. Wielding control as primary humor writer and Capital Reader, Bangs's genteel vision (partly due to inclination and political commitment, partly due to financial need) made its mark on American literary history.[13]

In his biography of his father, Francis Hyde Bangs writes a history of the Drawer and catalogues John Kendrick's effort to liven up the old department. After noting the Drawer's status as "an institution of American Humor," Francis asserts that by the end of the 1880s, when "swifter" journalistic practices and popular comic weeklies were becoming the norm, "a monthly service of anecdotes took on something of the nature of slow freight" (104). Even John Kendrick, writing for *Life*, had referred to onetime Drawer editor Charles Dudley Warner as "Charles Dudley Warning." Francis writes that his twenty-six-year-old father was hired "as a representative of the new developments in humor and satire" to "rehabilitate" the dilapidated, stuffy Drawer (104). Soon, newspapers from the *Philadelphia American* to the *Boston Evening Record* were praising the vigorous young humorist for adding a literary quality to the department and "weeding out" musty jokes. Bangs's new duties only necessitated two afternoons of work a week, leaving time to also work for Frank A. Munsey, edit the humor section in *Harper's Young People*, and contribute material to *Harper's Weekly*.[14]

Bangs's changes, however, did not push *Harper's* in a more "popular" direction, even if they were an effort to adapt to a changing, much larger literary marketplace. Instead, Bangs changed *Harper's* by making it even more Harper's, that is, by shoring up its place as an elite magazine written for the distinguished, cultivated reader. Exman repeats this version of *Harper's* history, recording Bangs's Capital Reading and Writing impact in this most revealing narrative:

> [Bangs] managed to pull a lot of funny stories from the squeaky "Editor's Drawer"; for his own jokes he paid himself one dollar and for the others, including the only one Remington ever wrote, two. The best of his own were published in several collections.... Despite his friendship with Mark Twain, Howells claimed that Bangs, as a humorist, had the field to himself. His humor was often satirical and always distinguished by a sense of literary value. The latter quality led to his being asked in 1898 to write "Literary Notes" for the

> *Magazine* and to edit the American edition of *Literature*, a weekly paper of literary criticism published in association with the London *Times*. (178)

"Literary value," of course, is a dually meaningful term for the Harper's house, which always understood literary value as intimately linked to aesthetic hierarchy and economic capital. As a kind of House patriot, Bangs's official tastes (like those of Howells, it must be noted) coincided neatly with Harper's interests, and so his role as writer of the "Literary Notes" – which almost exclusively reviewed Harper's publications – meant he was doubly qualified to be a Harper's literary man. The link between Harper's humor, literary quality, and economic capital is pronounced in the career and institutional position of Bangs.[15]

As Capital Reader and literary reviewer at an institution of national importance, and as editor of one of the magazine's most popular and profitable departments, Bangs's editorial duties were not taken lightly and often necessitated high personal literary output:

> In editing the monthly "Drawer" and the weekly pages of the *Bazar* [sic] and *Young People*, Bangs had to be wary of old jokes and on the lookout for new. To make sure that the jests were reasonably fresh or only moderately plagiaristic, Bangs supplied a great part of this short stuff himself, unsigned, at the rate of what he designated as $150 gross. Bangs paid himself one dollar a jest where he paid other contributors two. (123)

While payment for Drawer tales, as that dilapidated index-card filled filing cabinet I studied indicates, was not quite so simple as this history might suggest (stories, plays and poems were paid at different rates from anecdotes), nonetheless it is the case that Bangs produced much of the humor himself. Indeed, while Bangs's Harper's duties were not all-encompassing, his desire for financial gain and for clean, unplagiarized content made him a hardworking humorist. Francis Bangs records the consequences of such labor:

> Bangs had the reputation of writing [in the 90s] a dozen jokes a day just for relaxation. Jokes even invaded his dreams:
>
> I've read London *Punch* from beginning to end,
> On all comic papers much money I spend,
> But naught that is in them can ever seem bright
> Beside the rich jokes that I dream of by night (124)

Like J. Henry, Francis remembers humor writing as "relaxing" rather than laborious, but still notes the punishing pervasiveness of a job that manifests itself even in nighttime fantasy. Coining humor, for Bangs as for Loomis in his "Dialect Shop" fancy, seems to have been a muddled jumble of rewarding literary pursuit and difficult economic accrual, in addition to being the source of fantastic dreams.

J. Henry's own memory of Bangs captures the duality of the working but distinguished humorist's position at Harper's in the 1890s, who had to maintain the magazine's genteel aura even in the unstable pages of a humor department whose point was to encourage an affective readerly response somewhat at odds with official genteelese. J. Henry writes:

> On one occasion I invited [Bangs] to lunch with me to meet an English friend who had just arrived in New York, and afterward we went to Ardsley to play golf. A few days later I received the following bill:
>
> Ardsley, *Nov*. 12, 1897
>
> Mr. J. Henry Harper

To the Bangs Entertainment Co., Dr.

Oct. 9

Entertaining one Englishman eight hours @ $10	$80
Entertaining one Publisher eight hours @ $2	16
Laughing at Englishman's jokes	75
Jests supplied at Luncheon	2.50
One brassey, broken while playing golf with Englishman	2
Disbursements, Link cards, Caddies, Scotches & Soda.	10.28

	185.78

Please remit. (582-83)

While J. Henry takes this as the playful joke of a fondly remembered acquaintance, it seems as if at least part of the joke was being played on him. The joke clearly evokes the tension felt by the tired, hired humorist who needed money but who also needed to live in a genteel fantasy where money, though central to daily activity, was an uncouth subject for polite friends. Humor was important enough for the Harpers to maintain a house humorist who contributed to all four of their most important publications (and who even wrote some bestselling books for the firm), but its actual production at the house always threatened to link the magazine's genteel pursuit of literary excellence to the marketplace, its supposed opposite.

The Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry

James L. Ford's 1894 semi-fictional collection *The Literary Shop and Other Tales* powerfully limns the rude, anti-genteel capitalist side of Harper's history that its humor departments threatened to disclose. Ford's account is doubly significant for the history I am trying to tell in this chapter, however, because it both illustrates that "crude" editorial practice which is so absent from *Harper's* image of itself (recall the illustration of Alden gently dispensing editorial wisdom) and exposes the meaningful sense in which the *distinction* of the pursuit of capital from genteel culture is itself symptomatic of an industry geared towards capital. Howard cites the book as an example of public discussion of the house's commercialism, as opposed to more widely acknowledged discussion of the house's "undoubted social standing" and "prestige" (79-80), but neglects to mention the extent to which regular discussion of the house's commercialism almost always went alongside assertions of its genteel literary standing. The key point of Ford's version of events is not simply that he engages the firm's commercialism but instead that he engages that commercialism as a negative complicity in capital that could somehow be escaped to achieve a truly genteel or aesthetic editorial practice. Ford's book provides a humorous, exaggerated, but revealing account of often cutthroat, instrumental or even just plain arbitrary literary production at what he calls "the Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry" (25).

The significance of Whalen's Capital Reader for nineteenth-century literary publication, it is worth noting, is buttressed by Ford's complaints over magazine editors who wanted "good bad stuff" (28) and writers who needed to take one good idea for a poem and cut it up into sufficient matter for sixteen separate yards of verse. As Ford so crucially points out, perceived editorial standards (based on perceived audience tastes) invest literature before even pen hits paper, and not only during the explicit editorial process: "I soon found that every literary man of my acquaintance was fully aware of [the editor's] feelings in the matter, and therefore took pains not to introduce into a story any scenes or characters which might serve to render the manuscript unsalable in the eyes of the [magazine's] editors; and as years rolled on I could not help noticing the effect which this…. had in moulding the fiction of our day and generation" (69). Successful writers are often nothing more than "careful students of the great literary principles described in these pages, and have thereby acquired the art of writing exactly what can be printed without injury to the susceptibilities of a single advertiser or subscriber" (162). For Ford, the great crime of Capital Readers is their stifling of creativity at all scenes of literary production rather than just at the editor's cutting floor. Since magazines like *Harper's, Century* and *Scribner's Monthly* published many of the subsequently canonized works of nineteenth-century U.S. fiction, in addition to reams of writing popular and acclaimed at the time, what is at stake in Ford's version of literary pursuit is the quality of American literature and its principles of evaluation, both of which were formed in part by capital before pen hit paper and pencil crossed out sentence. Ford's account may be critical, but just like the accounts of Exman and Lapham, it articulates capital as a corruptor of quality and progress, imagining the crass interests of editors as a regrettable corruption of genteel magazine making rather than constitutive of it. The point is that Ford's exposure of genteel magazines' complicity in capital is as essential as Exman and Lapham's gilding for the production of a narrative that imagines *Harper's* might sometimes escape the interests of capital and serve only the interests of a literary greatness beyond the pale of business.

Ford is particularly candid (and funny) when writing about editorial "tastes" that are entirely determined by crass appraisals of the consuming masses. Detailing the particular standards of quality magazine editors, he notes: "There is some good reason for every one of these likes and dislikes. If Mr. Gilder prefers oatmeal to wheaten grits as a breakfast-table dish for the hero of the new *Century* serial, it is because he has an eye on his Scotch subscribers; and if the manuscript of *Robinson Crusoe* is returned to Mr. De Foe with the remark that "[editor] Burlingame is down on goats," it is simply because *Scribner's Magazine* is not pushing its sale in Harlem and Williamsburg" (21-22). Such editors – or "magazine barons" as Ford viciously describes them (36-37) – stand between working writers and the ten dollar bills that keep the creators of "good bad stuff" in drinks, lodging and companionship. Ford's account asserts that submissions are converted into money via the editor/Capital Reader's absolute and total devotion to perceptions of audience tastes, no matter how bizarre, wrongheaded or pedestrian.

Significantly, while Ford satirizes Harper's complicity in the corruption of literary taste, he does single them out for more than one fine, praiseworthy bit of editing. In these laudatory passages, Ford praises the magazine for publishing George Du Maurier's hugely popular novel *Trilby*, arguing that, in this case at least, the tastes of the masses took a backseat to the tastes of literary genius. "Let us not forget," he writes, "to give thanks to the Harpers for the courage which they have shown in publishing [*Trilby*], for if there is anything calculated to injure them in the eyes of the gas-fitters and paper-hangers it is a novel in which the truth is told in the high-minded, cleanly, and straightforward fashion in which Mr. Du Maurier tells it here.... for there is scarcely a chapter that does not fairly teem with matter that has long been forbidden in all well-regulated magazine offices, and I know that a great many experienced manufacturers of and dealers in serial fiction believe that it marks a new era in literature" (56-8). Ford's praise is curiously contradictory insofar as *Trilby* greatly boosted the magazine's circulation by securing the attention of a great part of the U.S. reading public, and thus presumably appealing to the supposedly poor tastes of the less than tasteful classes.

Later, when Ford thanks *Harper's* for publishing a piece by one Francois Coppee that contradicted all known (and therefore bad) magazine fiction laws, Ford's investment in distinguished literary readers and tastes supposedly operating outside capital again appears:

> the pages of that story were neither torn by nervous feminine claws nor blackened by grimy hands.... When I had finished the book I looked up and saw that I was still in the library, for there were the shelves full of what are termed the 'leading periodicals of the day,' and two elderly ladies were racing across the room for the new number of *Life*. And then in the fullness of my heart I gave thanks to the great firm of publishers that had dared to violate all the sacred traditions that have been handed down from the Bonnerian to the Johnsonian age of letters and print a story that could make me forget for half an hour that I had a thousand words of "humorous matter" to write before twelve o'clock.... I have special cause to feel grateful to the famous house of Harper for the literary stimulus which the story gave me. (101-03).

Such passages reveal, in their classist and misogynist assumptions, that Ford's condemnation of the Capital Reader is itself invested in ideologies of tastes determined by the flow of capital. Dismissing the crass editor interested in making money, whose tastes purposefully reflect those of readers who work for money, Ford values a readership free to correctly evaluate literature precisely because they already own plenty of economic and cultural capital. Ford's humorous attack on the Capital Reader figure, in other words, is accompanied by a firm investment in the properly discriminating tastes of a collective group of Capital Readers. The contradiction is especially clear here: only those who have accrued capital are free to escape it and write and appreciate literature free of capital's constraints; freedom from capital is contingent upon being caught up in capital.

Ford's literary classifications, in addition to being inflected by class politics, are caught up in nationalist literary appraisal. On this stage, even *Harper's* magnanimity knows national boundaries. After stating again his "admiration for the enlightened policy which gave this unusual bit of fiction to the American public," and detailing this praise to a friend, Ford writes:

> "Yes," said my friend, rather grudgingly, "it was a big thing of Alden to buy that story; but if that story had been offered by an American they wouldn't have touched it with a forty-foot pole." My friend was quite right, for if that story, or one like it, were offered in the literary market by an American writer, the editor to whom it was offered would know at once that it had been stolen, and would be perfectly justified in locking his office door and calling for the police. (105)

The comical overreaction of the duped editor critiques U.S. magazine editors for their unpatriotic literary commitments *and* indicts those editors for creating an American literary scene that really does prevent home-grown authors from writing fine literature. Even *Harper's* here is condemned for fostering the bad American writing they despise.

Perhaps the least *Harper's*-like account of the house's history is Ford's "The Poets' Strike," a humorous fiction that tells the story of economic relations and literary production at the Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry. In the story, which occupies an extreme end of the magazine's dual life, the great printing machines have run silent and the "dialect department" has been deserted due to a strike by the foundry's poets. The "master poet" addresses his fellow "prosers, rhymesters, and dialectists" to denounce "the ruinous competition of scab or non-union labor" that threatens the livelihood of the already underpaid writers. Pointing to "a square, one-horse vehicle," the master declares:

> Do you know what that cart contains? See those men remove the iron scuttle on the sidewalk, and listen to the roar and rumble as the cart discharges its contents into the cellar beneath the pavement! Is that coal they are putting in with which to feed the tireless engine that furnishes motive power to the factory? No, my friends; that is a load of jokes for the back pages of *Harper's Bazar* [sp], collected from the sweating-shops about Washington Square and Ninth Street. Do those jokes bear the union label? They do not. Many of them, no doubt, are made by Italians and Chinese, to the shame and degradation of our calling. (185-86)

Like Loomis's tale of the dialect shop, Ford's imagined strike leader is meant to be an exaggeration subject to ridicule, a silly fancy that highlights the real differences between literary production and labor while playing on contemporary battles between labor and capital. The ridiculous aspect of the connection is doubly stressed by the link made between coal and jokes (reminiscent of S. S. Cox's use of coal to designate "negro" humor), the "loads" of jokes here serving a similar function to Loomis's "yards" of dialect or even Francis Bangs's image of "slow freight." But Ford's tale also toys with the possible connections between labor and writing, in that, like Loomis's dream of a dialect shop, and Bangs's ridiculous, eponymous entertainment company, this joke factory is not quite so different from its labor-opposite as it should be. In both of these tales, though one focuses on the marketplace and the other on the scene of production, humor serves as the figure that both separates and knits together literary production and labor, highlighting the fact that while literary production is different from non-cultural labor, it is still a scene of production, and its point of sale still a marketplace.

Listening from above to the master's rallying cries, the magazine barons ponder giving in to the strikers' demands, only to have Mr. Harry Harper proclaim:

> For my part.... I believe that it would be a good policy for us to introduce machinery at once, and get rid of those poets, who are forever making demands on us. The *Century* people have had machines in operation for some time past, and have found them very satisfactory. We must admit that a great deal of their poetry is as good as our hand-made verses. (187)

Editor Alden replies by describing in detail a process of literary production most amenable to the ends of his capitalist enterprise, asking

> Do you know.... that that Chicago machine they put in some time ago is simply one of Armour's old sausage mills remodeled?.... It is really a very ingenious piece of mechanism, and when you think that they throw a quantity of hoofs ,

> hair, and other waste particles from the Chicago stock-yards into a hopper, and convert them into a French or Italian serial story of firm, fine texture – well, making a silk purse out of a sow's ear is nothing to it. (187-88)

In this gross imagery of industrial production via mechanized conversion, the magazine barons fantasize about the same mode of production as Loomis's newspapermen, in which dialect, humor or poetry is turned out efficiently in a context evacuated of the hands of labor (those who run the machines are not part of Ford's fantastic account). The difference, of course, is that for Loomis's newspapermen the dialect shop promises freedom from the demands of literary labor, while for the Harpers the poetry machine promises freedom from the demands of literary laborers themselves. The form that Alden imagines converting animal waste into literature – the machine and the factory – captures with precision Ford's critique that the Capital Reader sacrifices literary quality in the pursuit of capital. In this sense, Ford's humorous magazine history directly opposes the *Harper's* version in which Alden, head gently bent, is the one who labors and sweats under reams and reams of submissions while sympathizing with immaculately dressed, disappointed but well-appointed writers, even as it buys into the same belief in literature's ideal separation from capital.

After the Harper's chief threatens to post signs for scabs, a humble writer appears, willing to mediate for the laborers and do Harry Harper a good turn for a perceived kindness. Harper, shocked that he may have once been kind to anyone, soon learns that he saved the writer from desperate circumstances. It seems that when the young writer shook Harper's hand, the poet's fingers had become frostbitten, utterly impairing his capacity to write. Harper, in sympathy, had provided him with half-pay until he could "use a scanning-rule again." In an act of even greater generosity, Harper gave the writer's "idiot sister a job in the factory as a reader of manuscript." Alden is fully aware of this exceptional employee, declaring, "she selects all the short stories for the magazine, and I doubt if you could find, even in the office of the *Atlantic Monthly*, any one with such keen perceptions of what the public do not want as Susan Rondeau, the idiot reader of Franklin Square" (189-90). The poet asks Harper to give in to some concessions:

> Accept the offer of the Poets' Union to make a new sliding-scale. Make a few slight concessions to the men, and they will meet you half-way. Put emery wheels in the dialect shop instead of the old-fashioned cross-cut files and sandpaper that now take up so much of the men's time. Let one rhyme to the quatrain be sufficient at the metrical benches, and – it is a little thing, but it counts – buy some tickets for the poets' picnic summer-night's festival at Snoozer's Grove, which takes place next Monday afternoon and evening. (192)

While the poets' demands are of course the subject of Ford's ridicule, his effort here is also to expose the Harper House and its magazine as a commercial enterprise whose crassness knows no bounds. The account is especially cutting, too, when Ford pinpoints the "idiot reader's" genius as *negative*, as knowing what the public *do not want*, suggesting that Ford may have got his hands on a missive similar to that sent to Laurence Hutton in which the mass reader's negative tastes figure so prominently. Of course, Ford's account again attacks the role of women and the working class in the process of genteel literary production, but here the emphasis is shifted from the bad mass reading public to Alden and the Harpers themselves.[16]

Set against official house histories, the Editor's Drawer, and Bangs's career at *Harper's* as humorist and literary evaluator, Ford's satire renders visible the shared ideological foundation at the root of *Harper's* two lives. In the influential historical discourse that has informed the appreciation of genteel literature from Alden to Fischer to Lapham, and even in critiques of genteel literature like Ford's, the "best" writing is always imagined as bearing little or no relationship to the marketplace. I have endeavored to demonstrate, by tracing the relations between advertising and humor in the ongoing history of a genteel magazine, just how durable such perceptions of literary history have been, a durability registered even in twenty-first century accounts that miss the humor industry's significance for nineteenth-century literary production and still understand humor and advertising as exceptional or peripheral to U.S. literary history rather than as the keys to its constitutively contradictory narratives.

NOTES

[1] Throughout this chapter, I follow June Howard's "practice of referring to the corporate entity Harper & Brothers as 'Harper's,'" which itself "follows a precedent established in the title of *Harper's Monthly Magazine* and continued by almost everyone who writes about the firm" (288).

[2] Eugene Exman's *The Brothers Harper* and *The House of Harper*, though for the most part uncritical celebrations of the Harpers and their old publishing institution, are still thorough treatments of the house's history and its ongoing relationship to U.S. politics and culture. As with most critical treatments of the house, my history follows closely that outlined by Exman, with further reference to biographical accounts such as J. Henry Harper's *The House of Harper* and *I Remember*, U.S. magazine histories such as James Playsted Wood's *Magazines in the United States*, David Reed's *A History of American Magazines*, Frank Luther Mott's voluminous *A History of American Magazines*, and critical accounts such as Christopher P. Wilson's *The Labor of Words*, Richard Ohmann's *Selling Culture*, Nancy Glazener's *Reading for Realism* and June Howard's *Publishing the Family.*

[3] As Howard notes without any exaggeration whatsoever, "the House of Harper [was] an icon of the nation-building power of (in Benedict Anderson's memorable phrase) 'print capitalism'" (77).

[4] Howard puts this well in two phrases: "Harper's, a family business, published for families" and "*E Pluribus Unum:* the family, like 'the people,' did not abolish differences among individuals – but it consolidated them into a single figure" (Howard 73).

[5] See Richard Ohmann's account of this revolution and its relation to advertising in *Selling Culture.*

[6] Reed writes of the Harper's shift in policy:

> Despite the prejudice that 'any displays other than book notices lowered the dignity of a literary monthly,' Harper's could not resist the bait. So, in the June 1881 edition of their *Monthly* an insertion was made extolling the virtues of *The Sun* newspaper of New York. After this toe-dipping exercise, the splash came in December later that year, when a regular number of pages of advertisements per issue for the usual variety of organs, pianos, electric hair brushes and patent medicines began to be sandwiched between the *Harper's* literary notices like a rather nasty piece of baloney.

> Once the taste had been acquired there was no holding *Harper's*. Volume 81, for June to November 1890, contained 374.5 pages of paid insertions and only 91.45 for the products of the parent company. Against a total of 990 pages of editorial text and pictures, that indicates, for the period, six issues fat with advertising.

[7] Arthur John's history of the *Century* magazine implicitly represents this duality, arguing for the magazine's most prominent editor, Richard Watson Gilder, as an idealist working to direct American tastes in the direction of timeless truth and beauty, even as it necessarily records Gilder's primary role as seeking to secure capital through the magazine.

[8] The complexity of gauging the role of Capital Readers like Alden in literary production is captured by the opinions of Charles Francis Adams, Jr. in a piece addressing the social function of libraries in the nineteenth-century U.S. As Hendler notes, Adams distinguished between a marketplace for fiction and public library, arguing that "books that are 'made to sell'… belong in the market – subscription libraries and bookstores – and not in the public realm" (89). According to Adams, "the literary mass market is governed by a reading practice that is dangerously unidirectional: the reader is read by the market and thereby turned into a consumer. 'The publisher of today…. Studies the market, and not his own inner consciousness'" (89-90). Curiously, however, "Adams insisted that there is nothing essentially immoral about this procedure, for it is the economic logic of capitalism and the basis of some of America's highest literary accomplishments (his example is *Harper's Monthly*)" (90). Yet Adams contradicted his own argument by interpreting "the market as an immoral reversal of the ideal scene of reading" (89). For Adams, then, the Capital Reader (specifically the Capital Reader at *Harper's*) is both the guarantor of literary quality and competition and the violator of ideal reading practices.

[9] Janice A. Radway writes in *A Feeling For Books* of twentieth-century notions of "average readers" that seem to converge with their nineteenth-century counterparts. Radway's point is that "average readers" are ideas that provide guidelines for Capital Readers and that neatly index a publishing company's ideological commitments.

[10] Lapham writes of Alden's editing practice:

> Alden assumed an audience of polite and fastidious readers, people of "wealth and importance," intent upon furnishing their minds with ornaments as sumptuous as those that decorated their fine

> new houses in Newport or on Fifth Avenue, and by way of appropriate illustration he commissioned the work of Howard Pyle, Frederic Remington, and Charles Dana Gibson, inviting them to submit variations on a tragic or sentimental theme rather than unadorned line drawings meant to supplement an expository text. The magazine no longer had room for "the merely topical." What was wanted was personality and the subjective point of view, authors as well as artists with whom a well-bred reader might enjoy a "genteel discourse" or enter into "a conjugation of minds in the world of imagination" (xviii).

[11] Arthur John draws a connection between speech-making and the print location of humor departments at the back of elite magazines, noting that "like a lecturer sending his audience home smiling, [*Century* editor] Holland closed his magazine with a potpourri of light verse, anecdotes, cartoons, and parodies collectively labeled first as 'Etchings,' then as 'Bric-a-Brac,' and, in later years, as 'In Lighter Vein'" (20).

[12] J. Henry records a fantastic story of conversion:

> Dr. Prime received numerous contributions by mail, besides the material he found in the drawer of my grandfather's desk, and on one occasion a story came to him by post which appealed so keenly to his sense of humor that he decided to use it, although it was obviously personal in character and most uncomplimentary to the individual referred to. The name given was a common one, so he determined, in order to be on the safe side, to change it from Jones, say, to Smith, and also to substitute another town for the one given as the scene of the occurrence. To his astonishment, after the story appeared in the 36 Magazine, Dr. Prime was handed a letter received by the House, couched in the most abusive terms, threatening all kinds of proceedings in retaliation for the publication of the story. It subsequently turned out that the contributor of the story had himself carefully changed the names before submitting the narrative, and that Dr. Prime, with solicitous precaution, had in some miraculous way changed them back again to their original form. (34-6)

[13] J. Henry records for posterity the letter of invitation issued by Alden to Bangs:

> *April* 7, 1888
>
> DEAR SIR, -- With respect to the matters which have been discussed between you and Mr. J. Henry Harper, and between you and our Mr. Sinclair -- the 16th page of our BAZAR [sic] and your "Editor's Drawer" -- the Messrs. Harper wish me to say that they have in mind the possibility

---

> that some one especially fitted for the work might make for himself a distinct and recognized place here, in connection with such matters. It is a case in which one who attempts such work would have, in effect, the opportunity to shape a department for himself. The Messrs. Harper would be pleased to have you make the undertaking, and with the hope that you will succeed to your own satisfaction and theirs. Yours Sincerely, H.M. Alden (581)

[14] While Bangs's humor books were bestsellers in the 1890s and important players in the humor industry, it seems clear that his major impact was in his periodical work. As his son records, "the readers of Bangs's books were but in the ten and hundred thousands compared to the millions who presumably read him in the weeklies and monthlies" (181-82).

[15] Francis Bangs writes of these meta-capital reading practices (reviewing – especially book reviewing one's own house books) that

> Whatever limitations he, or Hutton before him, set upon the choice of books for review, was determined by a practical recognition of the sort of audience to which *Harper's Magazine* at that time appealed. The cultured class of the country was then, on the whole, what is now called "genteel," and the Harper reviewer had the courtesy to maintain a spirit of gentility, and to review books which it was thought would most appeal to that audience. (199)

Francis also notes the conventional imagined discordance between humor writing and literary endeavor (a lament as familiar in the twenty-first century as in the nineteenth):

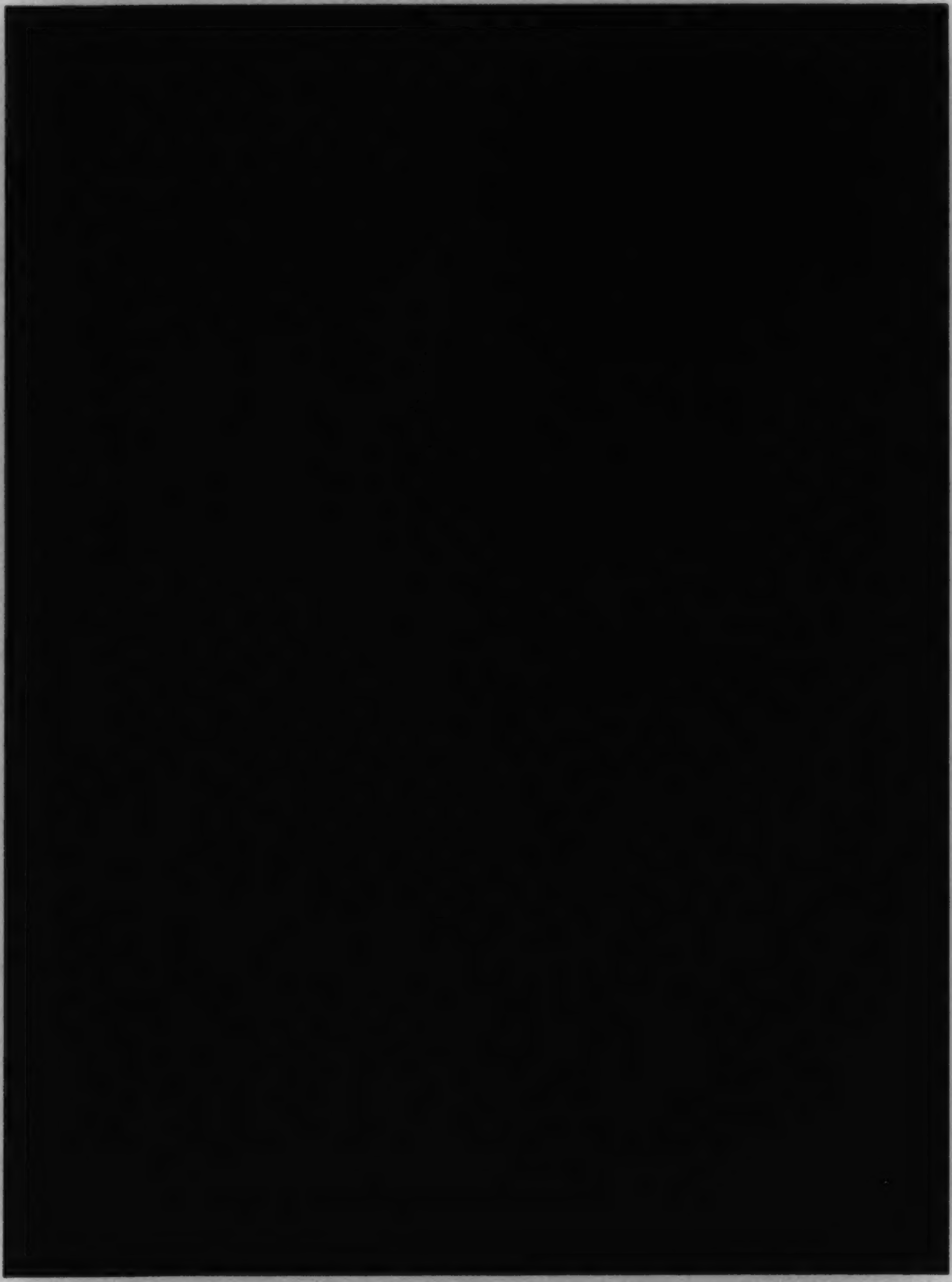
> When Bangs assumed the editorship of *Harper's Weekly* there was much surprise in certain quarters. It was wondered at that a "funny-man" – a strange limitation put by some people upon the term "humorist" – should occupy a chair formerly decorated with the dignity of George William Curtis and the self-righteousness of Carl Schurz. (208-09)

What Francis's wonder pinpoints is the logical intersection of literary and financial interests that made Bangs the obvious choice for editor of *Harper's Weekly* and director of *Harper's* Literary Notes department. Confusion in "certain quarters" is due entirely to the failure of "the public" to understand how magazines and publishing houses really work.

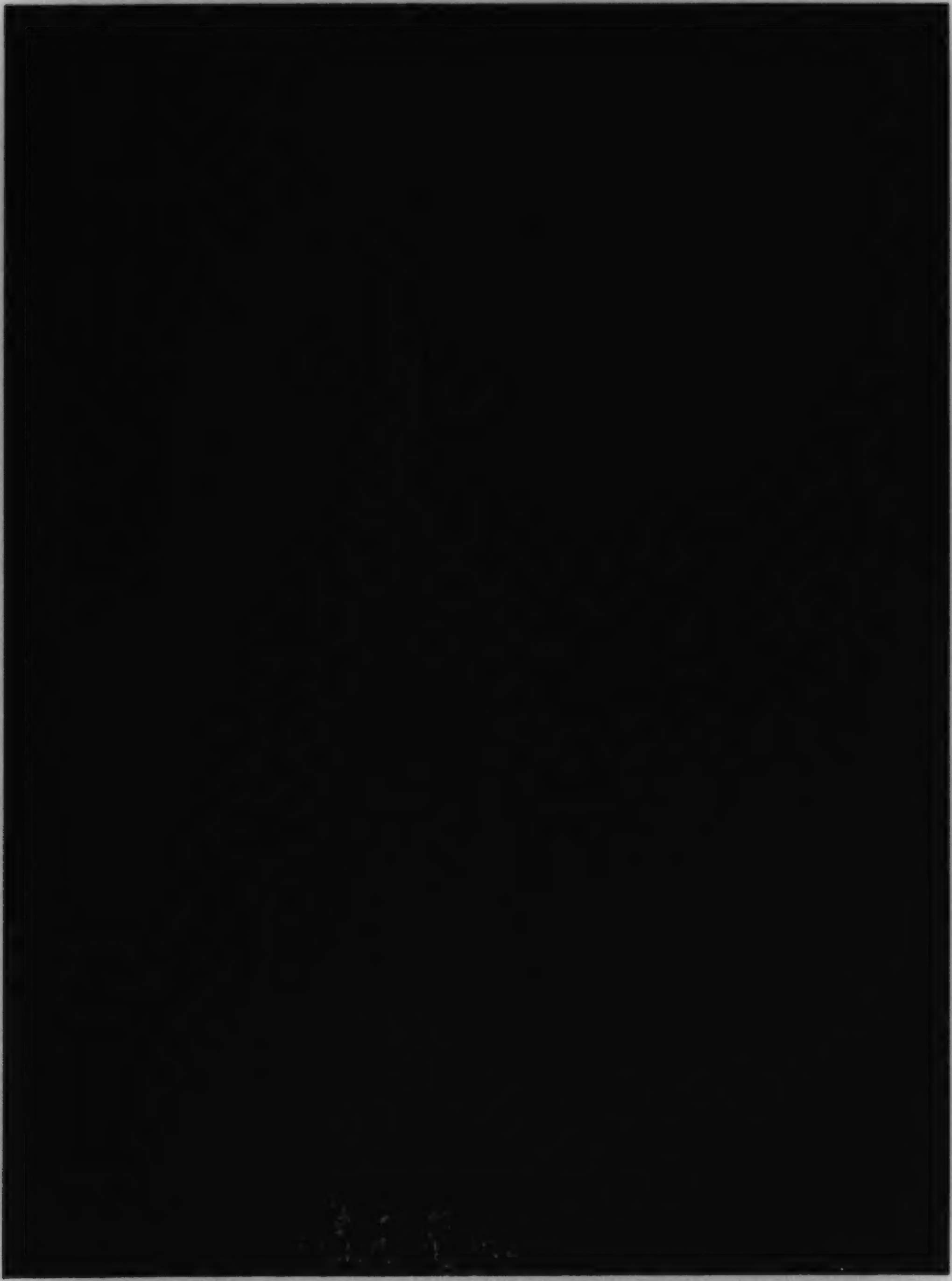
[16] Howard is right to note that "The Poets' Strike" " reminds us [that] the period after the torch was passed at Harper's was one of increasingly sharp class divisions in America" (80), but it also reminds us that even

humorous critiques of the Capital Reader are caught up in capital reading practices of their own; that is, Ford's critique relies on a contradictory notion that only those who have money are sufficiently aesthetically sensitive to write and read without regard for money (Ford's implicit argument that capital should be taken out of the process of production of quality literature relies on a contradictory belief that the only way to do that is to have capital in the first place; owning capital is the condition, somehow, for escaping it).

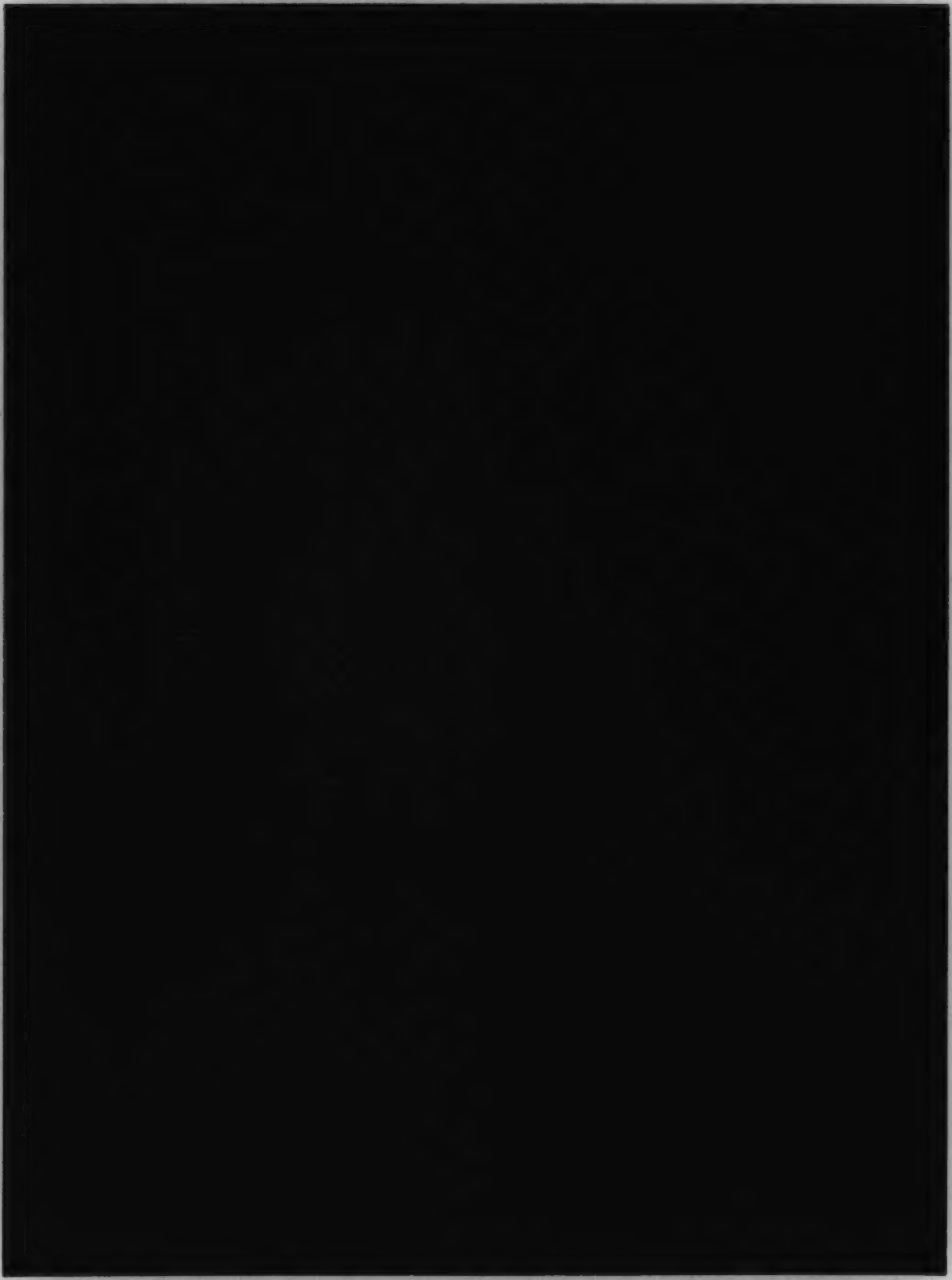
Chapter Three – Figure One



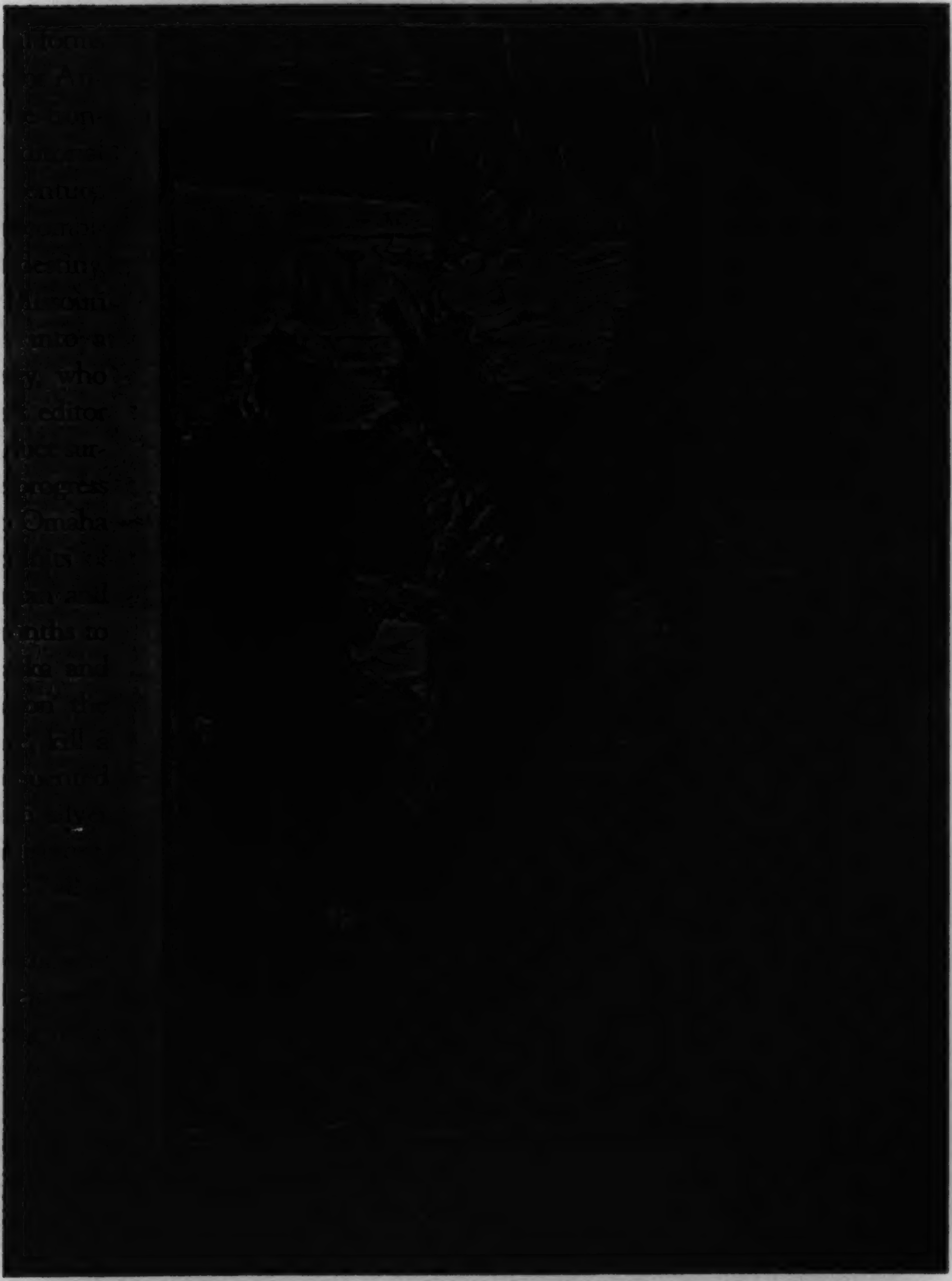
Chapter Three – Figure Two



Chapter Three – Figure Three



Chapter Three – Figure Four



Chapter Four: How to Read a Drawer

> PARTY: I don't need any advertising. Everyone knows me here.
>
> AGENT: A business man cannot be known too well. It is by keeping at it, in season and out of season, all the time. You can make the space so interesting that the average reader in town and out of town will become interested and will look it over. I have discovered in nine cases out of ten that space is considered unnecessary. Now, the whole trouble is they don't get down to the idea of getting space and that having space is important.
>
> -From a sales pitch in the 1891-93 diary of
> John Young Taylor, traveling ad salesman
> for The Art League of New York City

Layout in the Time of Postmodernity

In 1999, editor Karen L. Kilcup changed the name of the introductory section to the American Humor Studies flagship journal, *Studies in American Humor*, from "The Editor's Drawer" to "The Editor's Drawers." Kilcup explained the change as an effort to engage contemporary culture, noting with exaggerated prudence, "Readers will, I hope, pardon my impertinent expansion of my precursors' prerogative; in this cluttered postmodern world I thought it only reasonable that I expand the customary single drawer to at least two" (iii). The primary function of the journal's Drawers is to briefly outline the issue's focus and to explain its specific value for American Humor Studies. In the 1999 issue, focused on "Recovering New Humor," Kilcup praises the five essays for "offering what I hope will not only delight readers but also provide a set of teaching texts with accompanying critical essays" (1). Kilcup's "Drawers" piece is lighthearted, ending on the punning acknowledgement that hardworking colleagues helped "with my assumption of these Drawers" (1). In the 2000 issue, which focused on ethnicity, Kilcup again employed a humorous tone and took advantage of the possibility for punning with the term "Drawers," writing this time that "the materials emerging from this year's Drawers formed a serendipitous pattern for a special issue on humor and ethnicity" and concluding with "may our Drawers continue to be richly endowed!" (1) In both Drawers, Kilcup introduces "new" material and new questions to a traditionally stodgy and skeptical audience through a lighthearted, almost apologetic deferral to accident and good fortune over concerted, directed design; the journal's focus is changing, her introductions imply, because of the "times" or because of "serendipity," and not because of a politicized scholarship that traditional American humor scholars would otherwise reject. Her comments paint change as both arbitrary and harmless: presumably in the interests of avoiding division, Kilcup evacuates politicized scholarship of its relevance. Such efforts prove deeply contradictory in their effects, since the successful avoidance of division within AHS has only deepened the division between that field and American Studies more generally (that is, scholars who employ theories Kilcup dismisses have simply left the field or not joined). These humble assertions are written, significantly, in a punning, old-fashioned language riddled with clever alliterations and cautious assertions that the journal will "delight" as well as instruct. The strain evident in Kilcup's style, and especially in the punning reference to the future, did not bode well for the future endowedness of the Drawers, for the 2000 issue of the journal was the last to include the section.

What I find so curious about Kilcup's "new" name for a section in a journal issue dedicated to a form of "new" humor is just how old the name really is. Indeed, even Kilcup's *stylistic* flourishes recall the introductory appeal to readers that begins the very first *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* "Editor's Drawer" in 1851, which notes that "simplicity, earnestness, a desire to put down plainly our own natural thoughts and meditations, and the brief, amusing, or instructive thoughts of others – these are the means and this the purpose of our '*Editor's Drawer*'" (283-84). For both the Drawer and the Drawers, Fletcher Harper's desk symbolizes a kind of purification, converting potentially threatening materials (bawdy after-dinner talk; politicized literary scholarship) into text acceptable to the genteel family circle or the genteel AHS scholar. Such late-twentieth-century AHS echoes of nineteenth-century *Harper's* humor writing, subject matter, and style have been substantially theorized in my first chapter, where I note, for instance, that Sloane's 1998 *New Directions in American Humor* echoes nineteenth-century *Harper's* humor scholarship, dedicated as it is to buttressing U.S. nationalist exceptionalism with literary scholarship. The relevance of these echoes for my final chapter lies in the fact that their lighthearted effort to recall the eminent, popular *Harper's* humor department is accompanied by a revealing material print reversal I want to instrumentally overread: while the *Studies in American Humor* Drawers are printed at the front of the journal as introductory material, the *Harper's* Drawer was printed at the end of the magazine, immediately adjacent to the self-promoting "Literary Notes" department and, as I have noted, the rear advertising section (both of which are usually excised from bound collections of the magazine). The print locations of these departments index the work they do for their respective periodicals and highlight the significance of layout for editorial direction of reading practice: while the academic Drawers work to introduce official editorial matter, and the popular Drawer to close off such matter, both accustom readers to material (academic theory and advertising) considered superfluous to their respective journals' fare.

This chapter theorizes and historicizes such relations between humor and layout in the 1890s Editor's Drawer by first taking up a common practice of print culture and book history scholars who read the printed page materially, emphasizing through prescriptive critical readings the text's material features. The title of this chapter, in fact, draws on such familiar prescriptive titles as "How to Read a Book" and "How to Read a Page" that have famously argued, despite the risk of bibliographic pedantry, that the text's material features are constitutive of the text's history and mediate its relation to culture.[1] The point for such print culture "how to's" is not to go "back to the basics" but to demonstrate the important role of traditionally ignored bibliographic materials in how readers and editors produce and engage text. In this chapter, I will analyze the constitutive role bibliographic materials played in the shaping of the 1890s humor industry, and identify the forms of conversion they register, in order to theorize the relations between mass culture and humor, relations captured by the sense of "coining" I have invoked throughout the dissertation. Methodologically, the reading I put forward of the Drawer relies, then, on familiar print culture strategies for tracking the production of print and for gauging how print determines (in the sense of pressuring and setting limits to) reading practice. These strategies are often understood under one umbrella term, "what Roger Chartier calls 'object studies'.... Such studies combine attention to the book itself, with its format, layout, and typography – the cluster of characteristics connoted by the term *mise en page* – with research into the diverse conventions of reading in operation in its places of use" (Johns 385). I accompany this print culture approach, however, with a cultural materialist thick description, bringing together "the three dimensions of textual, historical and theoretical analysis" (Higgins 173). My lengthy account of the Drawer risks becoming bogged down in descriptive summary, but the kind of material analysis I argue for in this dissertation demands a close and detailed reading. Furthermore, since it is highly unlikely that my readers are familiar with the January, 1895 Drawer I analyze, and since one of my main points in this dissertation is that humor demands more attention of a different kind than is usually paid, a thick reading is doubly necessary. In this chapter, then, I systemically summarize the stories, jokes, anecdotes and illustrations, modulating between description, interpretation, and theorization. The point of my double intervention into print culture studies and cultural materialism is the key to this practice, to this chapter, and to this dissertation: by meshing object studies with cultural materialism, I will be able to read the Drawer in interimplication with the advertiser that follows it and track with precision how *Harper's* coined humor – and so identify the forms of conversion its print materials index.

It is here, then, that the positive contribution of this thesis to the study of humor and mass culture fully emerges. Whereas in previous chapters I have critiqued what is wrong with American Humor Studies, with stereotype theory, and with histories of Harper's, and followed each critique with a brief example of a new way to engage humor in the light of those critiques, I now want to offer a more complete set of methods and commitments that can be practiced not just here, in my reading of humor, but also at other scenes of reading. By applying bibliographic methodology to cultural materialist thick description, I am able to identify with greater precision the material and political issues that come into play when readers, writers and publishers coin humor in print. I am also able to put forward a more complete theory of how and why literature and advertising related in the period of the emergence of mass culture.[2]

The second section of this chapter reinforces the first by taking up an alternative approach within object studies that "concentrate[s] not on one object, but on one reader" (Johns 385). Such a concentration is possible when "a reader has left traces of his or her reading" (385), and it permits scholarship to gauge both the determinations of print and the creative ways readers engage print culture. My intervention will be to apply both print culture and cultural materialist methodologies as I focus on how two readers used print to coin humor. It is not my intention to discount other questions that are pressing for American Studies, such as those of accident and misuse raised so powerfully by Bill Brown, nor is it my intention naively to assume that print culture materials provide unmediated access to real historical practice. Instead, my intention is, for the moment at least, to privilege perhaps older cultural materialist questions and methodologies that bear directly on the material history of humor I am trying to write and that have not been adequately applied to humor history either by American Humor Studies or American Studies: by reading the diary and scrapbook of two 1890s humor readers, I want to theorize how and why readers make what use of humor they do while remaining "attuned to the specific limits and potentials of human agency" (Higgins 173). My intention is to narrate and theorize instances of coining and to add a modest chapter to the history of reading (and its relation to print culture) during the emergence of mass culture.

To this end, the second part of this chapter takes up the uses to which two late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century readers – one a U.S. traveling ad salesman, the other a Canadian druggist and entertainer – put the humor they read in U.S. humor departments like the Editor's Drawer. I hope to demonstrate in this analysis that the circuitous process of "coining humor," which is importantly directed by material print concerns, and by which humor is converted into profit, does not stop after initial print circulation, but instead that processes of coining, or imaginative conversion, happen even in the reading and professional practices of ad men and druggists. Articulating these readers' engagement with humor as "coining" rather than "reading," I put forward, highlights an intriguing form of conversion that operates at the level of the institution and of the reader, while setting in relief professional practices in the humor industry that are as difficult to document as they are meaningful.

The Editor's Drawer *for January, 1895*

The Editor's Drawer for January, 1895 is like many other Drawers, with a few exceptions I note in the following analysis. I read it here to show what my method offers histories of mass culture. I read this particular Drawer because it is generally representative of other Drawers in the 1890s, and because I own a copy of it, and am thus able to subject it to the kind of material analysis key to my methodology. This Drawer, like its counterparts, coins humor through the interplay of bibliographic and generic features and through affective hails to readers invested in navigating through a confusing mass culture caught up in a discourse of regionalism and professionalism. Though many readers surely flipped through the Drawer with little concern for sequence, the Drawer cumulatively points towards the advertising section that follows it and with which it is in constant dialogue. My reading of the Drawer is thus sequential, offering a cumulative analysis that pinpoints the material and discursive forms that converted humor into the partner of advertising.

The January, 1895 Drawer, like all Drawers, starts at the back of the magazine, immediately prior to the hidden advertising of the "Literary Notes" department, which reviewed almost exclusively Harper's books, and the rear advertising section proper. Like all Drawers, and like the "Monthly Record of Current Events" that takes up about a third of a page immediately before the Drawer, this one is also set in significantly smaller type than the articles that precede it (373; figure 1). Smaller type was a common feature of humor departments in elite magazines; the *Century* magazine, for instance, also set its humor department, "In Lighter Vein," in smaller type than the bulk of its editorial material. The smaller size of the type may be understood in a number of ways, but it is certain that size mattered as an indication of the relative value editors placed on material and the manner in which readers were to relate materials to their understanding of the magazine. Arthur John, in his history of the *Century* magazine, reads "the recession of the vogue" for dialect humor in the "relegation" of Harry Stillwell's writing to "the smaller type of 'In Lighter Vein'" (165), and it is probable that readers at the time would have interpreted such type-size signals in a similar fashion, recognizing the evaluative commentary implied by decisions relating to type-size, layout location and department affiliation. Placed at the back of the magazine, in small type and next to advertising, the 1895 Drawer is symbolically granted a marginal relation to what I will call the more "official" *Harper's* editorial material, a tactic that consigns the Drawer to a low literary status outside the more valued editorial features such as fiction and history pieces. This low status, however, was also the Drawer's particular strength, since it implied a different, lighter, and less burdened reading than that symbolically required by, say, scientific articles written by eminent thinkers. Recall the image I cited in the introduction that depicts "Two Readers of Harper's," one who reads from front to back and the other back to front; it is clear who is having more fun. The point is not, however, that there really are two different kinds of *Harper's* readers, but instead, and this is appropriate for a magazine with numerous "departments," that there are really at least two different ways for readers to read *Harper's*. The January, 1895 Drawer participates in this established and common periodical layout tradition even as its late position in layout and its typographical marginality provide a kind of material segue into the advertising section at the back. Just as the Drawer's affective address prepares readers for the lighthearted fare to follow in the advertiser, so too do its material characteristics imply the marginality of the advertiser to the magazine's editorial features.

Reinforcing this sense of marginality, the Drawer also participates in the common layout practice of printing material at the back of the magazine on lower quality paper than that at the front. As David Reed notes in his history of popular magazines, at *Harper's* "the habit of condensing the illustrations into the front of each issue was.... reinforced by the use of a higher quality paper in that part of the magazine. As the success of letterpress reproductions is dependent on the surface properties of the paper used, the company was able to maximise image quality in the front section. Conversely, it printed the latter part of each issue on cheaper stock, thus minimizing expenses" (53-54). As advertising revenue increased by the end of the 1880s and into the 1890s, the magazine was "able to use better paper throughout each issue. However, old habits died hard and the quality varied from signature to signature. Profusely illustrated articles were printed on better quality, super-calendered paper, while those that relied purely on text were printed on the signatures of cheaper grades. Parsimony was still the watchword" (58-59). From my perspective, looking at and feeling the January 1895 Drawer in 2004, the paper at the back seems to be of poorer quality than that at the front, but not so significantly that I imagine I would notice it if I were not looking for it. It is also worth pointing out that it is difficult to track precisely where the higher quality paper ends and the poorer begins. Without overemphasizing this issue, then, I want to stress that what Reed's observations mean for my material history of the Drawer is that the humor department is consistently marked by its materials and its space in layout as symbolically marginal to the magazine's quality editorial material closer to the front. The Drawer's location next to the lucrative rear advertising section, and reminiscences such as those of Fletcher and J. Henry Harper that assert the Drawer's central place in the magazine's profitability, only serve to reinforce the supposedly exceptional but actually entirely constitutive relation the humor department bore to the magazine's literary and economic pretensions; that is, they underline the sense in which *Harper's* coins humor by including it to entertain readers, to reinforce advertising, and to bring its own identity as an elite magazine into being (by imagining the humor department as exceptional to the magazine they bring into being that which humor and advertising are supposedly an exception to).

The January 1895 *Harper's* Drawer is, at eight pages, relatively lengthy (Drawers throughout the 1890s were on average four to five pages long, with the exception of December Christmas issues which often ran to more than ten pages in length), but otherwise it maintains a familiar Drawer structure that marks the department as a departure from regular editorial material. The department is introduced by an image of a mantelpiece with "Editor's Drawer" written in relatively large type and in a typeface that is less serifed than the text (compare the "T" in the mantelpiece to a capital "T" in the text) and slightly more calligraphic (note the almost awkward leg on the capital "R"s in the mantelpiece) (373; figure 1). The mantel is spiced up by two diminutive laughing faces which signal the unique character of this department in the magazine. Immediately underneath the mantel, after a line or two of space, the Drawer's first story, "Budstart's Peculiar Election," is announced in capital letters of a slightly larger font than the text of the story; and immediately underneath this, in capital letters of the same size as the text proper, is the name of the author, Hayden Carruth, a regular Drawer contributor. While this introduction involves some typeface and layout flourishes, including the mantel's spread over the two columns of the page, and the story title's spacing over the two columns, the page is generally quite stiff, formal and unimaginative in its layout (compare this to the fun layout in Marietta Holley's *Samantha at the World's Fair* I cite in chapter two). Especially dull is the absence of illustration on the first page of this relatively well-illustrated Drawer; an illustration would have delivered a more lighthearted introduction to the department than the staid mantel and the awkward Rs. Still, the Drawer is marked by its location, its type size, and laughing mantelpiece figures as a lighthearted department different from the material preceding it.

The first piece in this Drawer registers immediately in its title and opening paragraphs many of the Drawer's standard features, gesturing as it does to easily identifiable generic identity, unfortunate peculiarity, and the importance of regulated professional life. "Budstart's Peculiar Election" announces its generic, regional, and stylistic commitments via the unfamiliar, ridiculous name "Budstart."[3] In a sense, "peculiar" is redundant since "Budstart's Election" would presumably have signaled to readers a peculiar enough situation. Like Twain's famous Calaveras County story, this tale is narrated through the medium of an upstanding Easterner. Furthermore, like many Drawer stories and anecdotes, "Budstart" is replete with distinguished professional characters: the narrator is known as "the Judge," and he is speaking conversationally to "the Doctor." Likewise present is someone known as "the devine," presumably an ordained minister whose professional status includes him in the conversation. Indeed, this cornucopia of professional men recalls J. Henry's reminiscence that the Drawer started with after-dinner conversations among genteel professional men. The title, conversational narrative structure, and professional characters all signal the resolutely generic qualities of the piece, setting up a contract with readers who would have been able to tell from just the first few sentences what to expect from this predictable Eastern-narrated tale of professional identities out of control in the Wild West.

The story the judge tells, which is in the form of a lengthy conversational anecdote, is set in Running Horse, Dakota, and involves a young man named Budstart who began a newspaper called "*The Running Horse Palladium.*" The appropriateness of his name – young/bud, new paper/start – is humorously juxtaposed to the ridiculous inappropriateness of his paper's name, which tries to recall by virtue of the word

"Palladium" an ancient history totally out of place in the wild Dakotas. As the judge notes, not in reference to Budstart's name but in reference to his lack of official professional qualifications, "his fitness for the post of editor was not particularly apparent; but in those days many things in the Territory were not particularly apparent, and of no class of phenomena was this more often the case than that of the position in which men were found" (323). The 'professional' flavor of the Drawer proudly manifests itself throughout this story, which confirms the justness of the Eastern elite's penchant for organized, certified professions by contrasting that culture to the arbitrariness of narrowly regional standards of ability, training, and appellation.

Carruth's professional morality play centers on the figure of 'Doc' Hadley, who holds the office of coroner and is the real focus of the story. Unlike real doctors, 'Doc' Hadley never handled a real case in his tenure as coroner, due to the general peaceableness of the county. In reality a sheep-herder, Hadley "wasn't a regularly educated physician, by any means, having got his entire knowledge of medicine from a certain aged grandmother, who lived to one hundred and one years, thanks to the curative strengthening, preserving, and prolonging virtues of the black-cat-skin poultice, made on the hide side, cat to be killed in the dark of the moon" (324). As many scholars of advertising, from Jackson Lears to Ellen Gruber Garvey, have noted, magazines and magazine advertising in the 1890s and immediately after often told stories with relatively obvious messages about how to conduct oneself in the modern age. Carruth's story participates in this common, emerging discourse – the same that takes place in the advertising section – by informing its readers of the foolishness of believing in folk medicines, no matter what the length of their grandmothers' lives or the breadth of their healing experiences, which are reduced to vicious, superstitious and ridiculous cat killings. The exotic, ridiculous nature of the caricatured folk wisdom encourages the reader to take up the countervailing promise of contemporaneity, of modern up-to-dateness, registered only a few pages away in advertisements.

'Doc' Hadley's cat medicine, and his unlikely professional appellation, provided enough imaginative material to prompt A.B. Frost's accompanying illustration, "Looking for Likely Cats," which takes up the top half of page 325 (figures 2 and 3). Frost depicts a dilapidated man with a cane looking over a dilapidated fence for black cats who, humorously endowed with knowledge of Hadley's pseudo-Hippocratic endeavor, scamper in all directions to escape a horrible end. Carruth, apparently, was not satisfied with illustrating Hadley's ersatz professionalism, or with repeatedly referring to its ridiculousness, for he notes at the end of the introduction to the "Doc" that "the office of coroner.... [was a] laughing-stock, and it would have been a direct insult to offer it to any other man in the county" (324). This blunt statement comes across as clunky and redundant, considering the tale's and genre's obvious judgment of Wild-Western society, but such repetitions are in fact a dominating feature of the genre.

The placement of Carruth's tale at the beginning of the Drawer grants it a special status as the most substantial piece in the Drawer, worthy of note. Almost always under Bangs's tenure, the Drawer begins with its longest piece, and this piece is also usually contributed by a recognizable figure like Carruth. In a sense, the Drawer's layout, symbolically, mimics that of the magazine itself, beginning with the most substantial and noteworthy piece (almost always accompanied by illustrations) and then moving on to shorter, less substantial ones. Although you do not have to read the Drawer or the magazine from front to back, since you can appreciate each article or joke on its own, an object reading (a study of the *mise en page*) suggests the Drawer, like the magazine, still grants a front-to-back reading a special symbolic status, privileging that kind of reading as the most logical or respectable even if the magazine's format is less reliant on front-to-back reading than traditional codex books. The way people read magazines is irreducible to mere sequence, but there is still a sense in which this kind of reading is implicit to the layout of the department. Carruth's narrative stands out for its substantiality, and when reading it, we need to recognize the symbolic status it enjoys as a result of the logic of layout, and the material commitment of pages, ink, type, and illustration. The moral tale about professionalization, then, also needs to be understood as representative of a key ideological commitment for *Harper's*, especially insofar as it is presented over and over again here in the Drawer's flagship piece, and insofar as it is an effort to convert conventional means of reading (front to back) into the opportunity to highlight certain pieces as worthy of attention.

Just below Carruth's tale, the end of which is marked by a spare line drawn over the middle half of the two columns, and taking up the rest of the third page of the Drawer, is a short anecdote entitled "Not the Same" written by Richard Stillman Powell (325). Like Carruth's narrative, it is about the unruly West. It begins with the exagerratedly erudite and periphrastic phrase, typical of many Drawer anecdote openings, "A neat example of the retort admonitive was recently made by a young Colorado mining engineer…" The quarter-column piece (spread over the bottom of two columns) takes up an implied conflict between "Eastern" and "Western" manners. To give away the ending: the East wins. When a barber, who calls his client, familiarly, "Morton," asks him in jovial response to tales of nefarious aliases, "what was *your* name back East?", the client quietly replies, "*Mister* Morton." The real touch, of course, is the final phrase "was the quiet reply," in which the clever Easterner, via genteel quietness, displays his better manners and his capacity to insult on the fly. Just as in Carruth's "Budstart" narrative, the anecdote underscores the humiliating consequences of (mis)valuing wild-west manners and titles, especially when, like Hadley, you fail to detect them. Furthermore, like Carruth's tale, Powell's anecdote underscores the distinct pleasure one might take in zinging and outwitting one's less sophisticated fellows-in-conversation, a profitable facility one can learn by reading the Drawer every month. As I note below in my discussion of the ads printed just a few pages later in the magazine, these jokes, and the pleasures and pains they imply with respect to practicing professional identity, coin humor for the magazine by encouraging the same kind of attitudes *Harper's* advertisers rely on. In these opening pieces, anxiety over how to act in an emerging professional and mass culture is converted into humor which is in turn converted into an emotional link between the Drawer and the advertiser.

In the next piece, the Drawer continues to coin humor by stressing the lessons that might be learned from reading it, especially ways to avoid embarrassing oneself in a professional culture obsessed with professional anxiety, regional contest, advertising, and class. The fourth page of the Drawer (326; figure 4) begins with a humorous poem that fills up most of the left-hand column, entitled "An Advertisement and a Confession." Relatively long for poetry in the Drawer, this particular poem is marked by the magazine's material investment in it as more than a throwaway joke or anecdote. Like many poems presented in the Drawer, this one is printed anonymously, but it is almost certainly the work of Bangs, who often wrote anonymous or pseudonymous material for the Drawer. More importantly, the poem is about fads, about writing loads and loads of popular fiction, and about animated quotidian objects, three conceits Bangs took up so frequently they might be considered almost his professional trademarks. There is also a mocking reference to the foolishness of those who pursue women's rights, another Bangs (but more generally Drawer) habit (see the end of *A House Boat on the Styx*). The poem is written from the perspective of a blotting pad who feels neglected by the selfish author who uses it without sharing profit or fame. "I get no credit from the mass," notes the blotting pad, who has also heard complaints about the author's writing from "The Ink," who would have been "disgraced" if some of the bad writing, which the pad now offers for salacious sale, "had not been erased" (326). Bangs's weird fantasy, however, is not so outrageous, as the poem viciously reminds us, for "If woman's going to make a fad/ Of rights, why not a blotting-pad?" (326) The profitable point of this joke, from the perspective of *Harper's*, is that by making fun of fads Bangs implies readers must remain up to date – that is, buy and read *Harper's* – not only to participate in fads but also to learn how to avoid participating in them, to distinguish the good fads from the bad, and to understand the constitutive relation between distinguishing, buying and identity.

While the poem recalls Francis Bangs's anecdote about poem-writing invading his father's dreams, it more interestingly recalls the "Dialect Store" narrative which opens my dissertation. First, it takes professional humor writing as a suitable subject for professional humor writing; and second, its highly imaginative content is as much nightmare as utopic fantasy, even if the nightmare/fantasy structure is reversed: in Loomis's tale, the avaricious dialect writer's fantasy is the genteel reader's nightmare, advocating as it does for the crass mass production of writing, while in Bangs's poem, the avaricious blotting pad's advertisement is the humor writer's nightmare and the genteel reader's fantasy, insofar as it provides fascinating, almost salacious access to the failures of the latest fad writer (note too that writing humor is figured in both pieces through reference to the materials of literacy – to stores, factories, ink, and blotting pads). The poem further resonates with the material history of humor I'm writing, since its reference to a threatening "advertisement" captures, perhaps, writerly worry over the close relations that obtain, in the Drawer and elsewhere, between humor writing and the still emerging but already omnipresent discourse and business of advertising.

The poem is followed by a relatively long anecdote called "An Advertising Genius" by David H. Talmadge that repeats again the by now familiar Drawer effort to coin humor by teaching its readers ways to practice humor and manage the complex discourse of advertising emerging in the 1890s. It spans two pages (326-27) and is interrupted by a 2/3 page illustration that, unlike Frost's cat picture, bears no direct relation to the textual narrative surrounding it. Like "Budstart," "Genius" is a conversation held by men, but these men, lounging around a grocery store, are unmarked by professional titles. Also like Budstart, but not to the same extent, the story is granted significant material investments of space, type, ink and illustration. The focus of the story is the crass amassing of personal fortunes through clever, nefarious advertising practices. Following immediately after Bangs's nervous advertising fantasy, in which the instruments of writing rise up to engage in modern marketing practices, Talmadge's anecdote ties in to the small-town feel of the Western stories (the setting for conversation is a grocery store, not genteel after-dinner banter) and to the modern feeling of Bangs's poem.

In "Genius," Sam Wilson, "a drummer from a Dubuque house," enters the talk of "immense fortunes that had been made by advertising" taking place in front of Holton's grocery (326). Wilson tells of a man named "Sloth" from "the East" who made a fortune in the relatively new medium of sophisticated, pushy advertising. According to Wilson, Sloth, who was in "the grocery and general produce business," and "a true artist" of advertising, made his first mark in imaginative marketing by attaching tiny ads to worms that he shoved into a rival's apples. Needless to say, he soon cornered the local market in apples and the "rival concern suffered materially" (326). The narration of this outrageous act is followed by one of the funniest, and most complex, passages I have read in the Drawer:

> "He must have been a mean sort of a fellow," said one of the group.
>
> "Oh, I don't know; business is business in this day and age, and a man must look out for himself. At one time Sloth had a short prayer printed on thin soda crackers, to do away with the form of saying grace. The idea was very popular for a time, and Sloth's name was in everybody's mouth, till it was found that the ink was making folks sick, when he stopped it. The rival market made an effort to have him brought up on a charge of attempted manslaughter, but failed." (326)

The passage is cluttered with rich puns and innuendoes that are worth working through. First, Sloth is clearly at least "mean," as the unnerved group member notes, and Wilson's clichéd this-day-and-age objection, which sounded as flat, I presume, in the 1890s as it does today, adds a touch of discomforting vicious indifference to the tale. Who is this

Wilson who is so willing to defend Sloth from charges of cruelty? Second, Sloth helps his customers do away with the inconvenience of prayer – calling attention to the slothfulness of modern conveniences which may one day fantastically threaten even quotidian religious practices, so pervasive and self-serving is the discourse of profitable time-saving. Third, there is the pun about Sloth's name being in everybody's mouth, which, delivered in an incongruous deadpan, is doubly funny and yet still upsetting. I read this passage four times, however, before I caught the really big joke, which is buried in the last sentence: Sloth's rival market in this case (incongruously accompanied by the grocery rival victimized by the worm ads) has to be the Catholic church. Are they upset at the attempted slaughter of their pious prayer consumers, or at the idea of the body of Christ being converted into a product in which the flesh is made into word and soda cracker, sold at a profit? Either way, the crass reference to institutionalized religious practice (not common for the Drawer) as a "rival concern" cynically figures all social practice, even worship, as fundamentally competitive, invidious and profit-oriented, at least from the perspective of advertisers.

After narrating these two fantastic, unsettling endeavors, Wilson is quick to note, unbelievably, that "these things, however, are nothing. I mention them only because they occur to me, not that they show in any degree the wonderful fertility of the soil in the publicity department of Sloth's brain" (326). After producing a large quantity of baking powder (a product ubiquitously and prominently advertised in the 1890s in magazines like *Harper's*), but finding no market, Sloth set his terrible genius to work. "It needed advertising; but he did not feel that he could afford to buy enough space in the newspapers to make himself known; for it was his theory that the name is what folks buy;

they don't care for the article so much" (326) Sloth's plan is revealed through the slow narration of his actions. Step one: secure free fame via evening papers by promising to rid the town of English sparrows. Step two: feed the sparrows so that, in the hundreds of thousands, they flock to his store. Step three: load capsules with baking soda and cover them with flour and salt. After drinking water provided by the generous Sloth, the birds begin to rise by chemical reaction into the sky:

> At one hundred feet a few of them popped, making a noise like the explosion of a paper bag, but the greater part of them rose higher. The sun was obscured, and people lighted gas in their houses. Oh, it was a wonderful sight – wonderful! Well, it rained popped English sparrows for a week all over that part of the country. The news was telegraphed broadcast. It was the talk of the hour. Sloth claims the scheme was worth ten thousand dollars to him, and I don't doubt it. His baking-powder sold faster than he could put it up; and that reminds me – (327)

At this point, Wilson's listeners "silently" file away, aware that they have been taken in by Wilson's disturbing shaggy dog story. The story ends with Wilson, feigning surprise, asking the grocery owner if he is in need of baking power, and being ordered away by the now doubly insulted grocer.

Talmadge's outrageous anecdote participates in the fantastic imaginative play of Bangs's poem and in that poem's worry about advertising run amok. Perhaps more importantly, however, the anecdote also plays into the theme from "Budstart," "Not the Same," and "Confession," involving conversation and insult. In all four pieces, insults, which go both perceived and unperceived, drive the humor and drama. In addition, all three prose pieces center on conversations that are interesting not only for their narrative content but also for the contests they set up between Judges and Doctors, barbers and clients, grocery store loungers and drummers. All three prose pieces also climax with revelatory reversals: in "Budstart," the Doctor turns out to be the real butt of the story; in "Not the Same," the joshing barber becomes the recipient of a quiet rebuke; and in "Genius," the lounging listeners are the real fools and followers of Sloth, gullibly taking in tall tales about fortune-amassing instead of actually working to achieve their selfish ends. Advertising here is seen as the crass tool of the con man, but a failure to fully appreciate what is at stake in the interplay between humor and advertising (the narrative about advertising itself is one long joke) is put forward as the real, embarrassing danger of not being up to date with respect to the emerging practices of mass culture.

"The Window Habit," a cartoon (so designated because it involves an illustration accompanied by explanatory, humorous text) by W.H. Hyde, accompanies these disturbing advertising fantasies (327; figure 5). Taking up just over half a page, it is a very conventional, even old-fashioned Drawer cartoon, insofar as it depicts two elegantly dressed and coiffed white women speaking comfortably amid quality furnishings. The generic nature of such illustrations is worth noting, since the situations and people depicted rarely indicate in any specific way what the joke might be. Indeed, it almost seems as if the drawings are produced only under the burden of illustrating a conversation among well-to-do white Americans, such that any textual joke might be added later. The text accompanying this illustration runs:

> "Poor Bobby Gargoyle has gone insane. He does nothing all day but sit and look out of the window."

"There's an asylum for men afflicted that way."

"Where?"

"In Fifth Avenue. It is called the Calubocker Club."

While I have been able to find no reference to a Calubocker Club, it is possible to understand this cartoon in the context of the Drawer alone. As the term "habit" suggests, the joke is about fads, a typical Drawer theme under the editorship of Bangs (his poem on the opposite page, for instance, includes a reference to women's rights as a fad). Here, the joke is also about masculine clubs and the extent to which such masculine institutions upset women, another favorite Bangs theme which in fact provides the main drama of his two mid-90s bestsellers, *A House-Boat on the Styx* and *The Pursuit of the House-Boat*. The banter in "Habit" is characterized by its laconic cleverness and the ease with which these obviously sophisticated women crack wise. One of the Drawer's consistent messages (in addition to a fascination with a war of the sexes) is that sophisticated people know how to be funny, even to the extent that for them humor is practically effortless.

The following page is comprised entirely of text, in the form of two anecdotes (328; figure 6). Their difference in length makes up for the lack of illustration; that is, the short anecdote, immediately identifiable by the material make up of the page that marks the beginning and end of anecdotes through titles, cleanses the palate before the more major commitment of the longer anecdote. The first is short (just over ¼ of a column) and is anonymous. Titled "Ringing for Prayers," it is a classic short Drawer piece, even down to the opening phrase that references the conversational circulation of such humor, "A very pretty story about a confiding child is told…" (328). The paragraph relates a cutesie story about the son of a member of the Georgia Legislature, reinforcing the professional and familial tone of the Drawer. Left alone in a hotel, the boy requests that the bell-boys bear witness to his daily prayers. The story has it all, as far as standard Drawer fare is concerned: a lawyer, a costly hotel, a cute, demanding little boy, and happy but confused servants. Following upon Sloth's selfish corruption of prayer, this saccharine story, delivered on a page with no images at all, is a kind of healing apology for the liberty taken just two pages earlier.

The longer anecdote takes up the rest of the page. Written by W.J. Henderson, "The Art of Self-Defence" is another tale about the Wild West (this time the setting is Montana). Here, a manly Easterner who misappropriates a professional title is taken to violent task by wary, unfriendly Westerners. The young man, "Prof. Jim Blakely, champion middle-weight" (328), arrives at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Wildcat City looking for paying pupils. As in "Budstart," the setting is marked as humorous by the incongruously extravagant name of a local institution while the drama is carried by the ridiculous, wrong assumption of a professional title. After buying drinks for others in the bar, Blakely offers to give them a free demonstration of his pugilistic prowess. Punching a volunteer up, Jim is soon surprised when "Old Missouri," a local drinker, pulls out a gun. Old Miss asks Jim to remove his gloves, and forces the "Professor" to smash his hand into a door until "his hands were bruised and cut dreadful" (328). Old Miss explains that in the West, guns are what you need for self-defence, and then "the Professor hurried back to Chicago" (328). In this tale, the usual focus of authority and power is reversed (held this time by the ruffian Westerner instead of the civilized Easterner; recall Powell's "Not the Same" in which the familiar barber is rebuked by his customer), but the message of the story remains familiar: fake professionals don't know what they're doing, and the improper assumption of professional status is properly met with violence, embarrassment, and derisive laughter. This message is repeated in the advertising section that follows, marking once again how *Harper's* coins humor by linking the Drawer to the advertiser, in terms of material layout, subject matter, affect and address.

The following page (329; figure 7) is taken up by an illustration that, at about ¾ of a page, is slightly larger than "Looking for Likely Cats" and "The Window Habit." Coyly titled "Very Remarkable," the cartoon depicts a very well attired woman and man conversing in an art gallery. Though there is perhaps some more specific scene content in this illustration than in "Window," the image could still be accompanied by any number of textual jokes. The point of the illustration, again, is to stress conversation and elegance rather than any specifically visual joke (unlike the action-packed "Cats" illustration). The text runs:

> "What is 917?"
>
> "It's called 'Sunrise on the Bronx.' One of Harry Barstow's."
>
> "Nothing remarkable about it, I should say."
>
> "Oh yes, there is – *it's sold*." (329)

The text takes part in a Drawer tradition of mocking less than remarkable artists whose ambitions far overreach their talents and abilities. It is worth noting that the image depicts three conversations, not one, and that, technically, any one of the three pairings could be responsible for the text at the bottom. Also worthy of note is the sharply divided gendering of the illustration, which depicts three women on the left side and three men on the right, marking the Drawer's sharply drawn division between genders, a division doubly struck by the ultra-fashionable and highly gendered clothing of the men and women depicted. This joke relies entirely on distinction: on the distinction between genders, on the distinction of class marked by clothing and manners, and on the distinction between good and bad art. Thus, though it seems to be distant from the jokes and lessons about the West and the East, and to avoid entirely discourses of advertising and mass culture, the illustration and joke actually contribute to the overall message of the Drawer: they depict an East that confirms by contrast the wildness of the west, and they dramatically display the rewards that may be gained from identifying with the East and with high culture – and with *Harper's* and its advertisers.

The bottom of this recto page is taken up by a short poem in the left-hand column and a short anecdote in the right (329). The poem is by Charles Converse Tyler and is titled, "Served Him Right." Unlike the rest of the pieces in this Drawer, this poem is set outside of the U.S. (in Lichtenberg), but like its counterparts it involves a conflict between sexes, a conflict between classes, and privileged lifestyle practices (in this case, international travel). In the poem, a traveler offers a gold coin to a serving maiden for a kiss, who has her revenge on his inappropriate advance by drinking his wine. Like the illustration above, it depicts an interaction between a man and woman (this time highly inappropriate, rather than almost ludicrously polite); like "Ringing for Prayers," it involves a humorously clumsy interaction between the serving and the served; and like "The Window Habit," it stages a conflict between the sexes.

The anecdote to its right, "Had a Hard Time," is anonymous, and involves another stock Drawer butt – the stereotype of the amazingly stupid "Irishman." In the tale, an accused arsonist offers the Irishman $5000 to convince his fellow jurists (and personal friends) to find a verdict of guilty in the second degree. Again, this anecdote stages a botched interaction between the serving and the served, for, while the Irishman secures the proper verdict, he confesses he managed to do so only after convincing the jury to abandon its unanimous support for another verdict – acquittal. This anecdote, like every other piece in this Drawer, is heavily informed by stereotypes, though here for the first time those have shifted the focus away from class and gender to ethnicity. Like most Irish jokes of the period, the humorous content of the story relies entirely on the unbelievable stupidity of the Irishman, and his vast capacity for political corruption.

The final Drawer page breaks with the layout pattern set over the past six pages, which all included full text on the verso page and a large illustration on the recto page. Unlike that relatively predictable, uninspired format, the final page (330; figure 8) sports some slightly more creative layout in which text and illustration break with the conventional two column page structure, setting the tone for the many creative illustrations to follow in the advertiser. The page is taken up by two related illustrations and two anecdotes. The two anecdotes are fit into clipped columns of half the length and less than 2/3 the width of a regular column. The first anecdote takes up about 7/8 of a column but is split over the two, since it begins halfway down the page. The second anecdote takes up about 1/8 of the clipped-width column and is easily the shortest piece in this Drawer. The first anecdote, "A Quiet Wedding," is by Tom P. Morgan, and, through its reference to a character named "Alkali Ike" and a newspaper called the "Hawkville *Clarion*," clearly participates in the regional humor of the West we have already seen in "Budstart," "Not the Same," and "Self-Defence." Ike relates that nothing much happened at a particular wedding, with the paltry exception of fantastically violent and disturbing events, from fights to broken arms to stolen food to arrests. Ike is upset that weddings these days have become so obviously dull, a crude exaggeration that plays rather unimaginatively on conventional regional and dialect stereotypes of the Wild West. The second anecdote is called "Hard Times" and is anonymous. It involves an "Uncle Eben," who is clearly drawn from "negro dialect" humor. Visiting the big city, Eben mistakes a monocle for a poor man's solution to a lack of proper eyewear. Like the Irishman joke, "Hard Times" draws on racial stereotypes and conventional joke themes (dumb Irish jokes, dumb negro jokes) for its humor. As in much of this Drawer's fare, the joke also leans on the vast and potentially embarrassing gulf of ignorance and behavior that exists between the city and the country, between the East and the West.

The two illustrations are representative examples of grotesque minstrel caricature. Titled "At the Minstrel Show – 1" and "At the Minstrel Show – 2" they leave the reader in no doubt as to their narrative relation (330). The illustrations, drawn by Drawer regular and Bangs collaborator Peter Newell, depict a minstrel couple grossly attired in loud, exaggerated, fancy costumes. The text for the first reads, "You' new dress is pooty nice, B'linda, but I mus' say dat I don't jes like dem polka dots," and the text for the second (which illustrates B'linda shaking the polka dots off her dress) runs "All right, sah" (330). Like most minstrel jokes, the humor is derived from the grotesque visual caricature, silly dialect (which looks as silly as it sounds), striking and ludicrous clothing, and prop surprise. The illustration is unlike its counterparts not only in its grotesque and unrealistic depiction of its characters and its use of color, but also in its image-driven humor. While most Drawer cartoons depict conversations that could be accompanied by practically any textual joke, "At the Minstrel Show 1 and 2" rely heavily on the visual for their humor (note the hat that pops off the dandy's head to indicate his surprise – a nice modern-feeling visual touch). Because of its cultural familiarity and manifest success, in addition to its employment of striking visual and verbal humor, minstrelsy's appearance on the last page of the department, just prior to the advertising material, is entirely in accordance with my argument that *Harper's* coined humor in the 1890s with advertising firmly in mind. If Eric Lott is right to say that humor is minstrelsy's great elaborated staple (5), then I might also claim here that in a similar sense minstrel humor is mass culture's own great elaborated staple.

This is the end of my description of the Drawer, but not the end of my analysis, since the flagship Harper humor department exists in an important relation to the materials that follow it. The "Literary Notes" department, in this issue written by Laurence Hutton (later in the decade, Bangs conducted this department in addition to the Drawer), begins on the recto page (1) opposite the final Drawer page and is designated according to its own page system, so that the pages are number 1 through 4, setting it apart from the Drawer (figure 9). This department, like the Drawer and the Monthly Record, is set in smaller than usual type, and is introduced by an elaborate mantelpiece-like image and a relatively adventurous title typeface. The difference is that the "Notes" mantel includes the Harper and Brother's official colophon, the passing of the torch, an appropriate symbolic reference given the department's commitment to reviewing Harper's books. At four pages of solid, double-column text (broken only by small lines indicating shifts from book to book), the "Notes" section is a distinctly residual, old-fashioned and clunky mode of self-advertisement (echoed later in the advertiser in an ad for Brander Matthews' Harper's books (advertiser page 60)), lingering incongruously between dominant and emerging modes such as the relatively modern illustrated Drawer and the decidedly modern advertising section.

The January, 1895 "Notes" section begins, appropriately enough for my history of the humor industry and my assertion of the close relations between humor, the Drawer, Harper's, and advertising, with a review of Charles Dudley Warner's Harper's novel, *The Golden House*. A well-known humorist who co-wrote *The Gilded Age* with Mark Twain and who, more significantly, conducted the Drawer for years while contributing introductory essays to the humor department, Warner's writing is the epitome of Drawer and Harper's humor. Hutton's opening paragraph for the "Notes" could, in fact, stand in as an official Harper house description of what ideal Harper's humor should be:

> Mr. Warner wields a pen of gentle sarcasm, as well as of shrewd wit, of kindly humor, and of profound common-sense. He says as many good things as he says wise things, and that is saying much. His sarcasm is aimed, usually, at that order of social mammals who are distinguished for the thickness of their intellectual skins, who call themselves "Society," and who fail to discover how often, and how mortally, they are hit; but his wit, and his humor, and his applied wisdom, fortunately, strike a less pachydermatous mark; and every bull's-eye tells. (1)

Such an opening is appropriate not only to the relations between the magazine's rear departments, but also to the general tone of this particular Notes, which includes in its ten reviews (all of which focus on Harper's books) a discussion of a book by famous Drawer contributor Ruth McEnery Stuart, and which ends with a discussion of the latest book from famous *Harper's* essayist George William Curtis. Indeed, the front advertising section of the Drawer includes a prominent advertisement for Warner's book, highlighting again the promotional purpose of Hutton's Notes department. If the house-humorist opening to the front advertiser and to the Notes is appropriate, then so is the Notes' house-nationalist ending:

> Let us erect our memorials, then, to no far-off Englishman or Scotchman, but to George William Curtis – our own son, our own brother, our own friend, our own lover; the synonym of our own generous scholarship, of our own spiritual light. (1)

The imbricated sense of nationalism, family, and incest that informs this gentle paragraph has been theorized in chapter three; what's worth stressing here is the almost poetic manner in which humor, the nation, the family and love blend together well with Hutton's effort to sell books while manufacturing and promoting a distinctly American literary reputation.

The relations among the rear departments are marked by somewhat clumsy pagination. Indeed, the pagination almost marks the entire editorial section of the magazine, which is the section that has been preserved for posterity in libraries, as an interlude or digression from the magazine's real content, the content that begins and ends the magazine: its advertising. While the last page of the Drawer is designated as page 330, appropriate to its place in the official *Harper's* volumes, and the "Notes" section is designated pages 1-4 (figures 9, 10, and 11), the rear advertising section, which begins on the recto page opposite the last verso page of "Notes," itself begins on page 29. The first 28 pages of the advertiser appear at the beginning of the magazine, just inside the front cover. While the Notes' particularized pagination sets it off from the official advertising section, it also sets it off from the magazine's official editorial material, perhaps accounting for the fact that in most book-bound volumes of the magazine, the Notes section is excised along with the advertiser. The advertiser's continuous pagination, which draws the front and rear sections together, marks advertising as separate from the editorial material, but also situates the advertiser as a kind of frame for the magazine's literary content.

Reading the Drawer for its relations to the 1890s humor industry means reading the advertising section that follows it. No print culture study or cultural materialist study would be complete without including the advertiser within the scope of its methodological apparatus, precisely because it is clear that the Drawer coins humor for the magazine, the reader, the writer, and the advertiser, through its inextricable relation with the ads that follow it. Like the "Notes," the advertiser is marked not only by its distinct pagination but also by a running head at the top of each page ("LITERARY NOTES" and "*Harper's Magazine Advertiser*"). The first page of the rear advertiser is relatively typical in layout and content, including three different advertisements that attempt to attract the reader's attention in strikingly different ways (figure 11) while recalling subject matter and illustration from the Drawer. The half-page ad at the top for Reed and Barton Silversmiths clearly appeals, through its elaborate typeface, fancy scrollwork, and realistic reproduction of five pieces of silverware, to the desire for distinguished furnishings and clothing repeatedly addressed in the Drawer. The ¼ page ad at the bottom left for Dr. Price's Cream Baking Powder, "The Most Perfect Made," is by contrast distinctly unsophisticated. Entirely text driven, with some play on typeface, boldness, and the half-moon structure of the brand "Price's," this ad clearly belongs to an early form of advertising not yet fully adapted to the visual, illustrated print culture that

Reed & Barton tap into. Following abruptly on Sloth's baking powder advertising scheme, Dr. Price's ad draws on the humorous reference to advertising, baking powder and cleverness established in the Drawer. The third ad, at the bottom right, for Liebig Company's Extract of Beef, cleverly taps into its print context, including as it does a drawing of a well dressed woman who could just as easily populate the pages of the Drawer as the Advertiser. Situated somewhere between the other two ads in terms of print sophistication, Liebig's ad appeals for readerly attention through variation in type boldness, illustration, and textual testimonial. Most significant for my reading of the Drawer and its relations to *Harper's* advertising, all three ads pick up some strand from the Drawer, whether it is direct subject matter (recall the story about advertising and baking powder), illustrative reference (recall the illustration for "The Window Habit," which depicts women very similar to the reading figure in the Liebig's ad), or expensive, fancy furnishings (compare the appeal of the Reed & Barton ad with that of the serving pieces in "The Window Habit").

These three advertisements register the meaningful extent to which the Drawer's humorous subjects and print materials relate to the magazine as a whole and to the wider humor industry. But this basic relation between the magazine, the Drawer, and the advertising is reinforced throughout. On the very next page (30), a foot dramatically kicks the word "hints" out of order, reinforcing the message in the ad's text and the message sent in so many of the corrective Drawer jokes: "Hints or Kicks? Which? You can have a happy experience, coming from hints – or a sad experience, coming from kicks. Now in the matter of cleanliness…." (figure 12). Here the instrumental force of the Drawer's anecdotes about people getting things wrong is set in intimate relation with the emerging discourse of brand name products; the ad draws on the discourse of how much better it is to deliver than to receive a kick for a social error and converts those jokes into the opportunity to promote its own brand – "Millions now use Pearline." Later, the Drawer's message about the relations between servants and masters, and *Harper's* message that it is the magazine of the masters (and therefore of aspriring masters), is punctuated by the ad for Hartshorn Shade Rollers called "The Servant's Fault," which declares in its own articulation of the relations between servant, master and product: "A careless servant is a severe trial to a housekeeper and a severe test to a window-shade" (278; figure 13).

The Drawer and the advertiser, in fact, are particularly good at making lessons, jokes, and regional and professional discourses pay off in numerous ways. The ad "Loaded for Bear" is a fine example of this kind of multiple articulation, a coining that works through the conversion of jokes about the wild west and colorful dialect into a lesson about how to run a business: "Loaded for bear is what they say of a man prepared for all emergencies. In the hunt for business, if a man wouldn't be 'treed,' it is safe to carry the 'deadliest' ammunition. Are you well equipped at all points? Does your advertising 'HIT THEM HARD'?" (56; figure 14). This ad also answers a question I raised in the introduction regarding the relevance of an illustration about "cutting an acquaintance" – here, clichéd, dialect-related phrases are transported from one venue (east to west or west to east) and are made to serve the interests of street violence, business, and, of course, humor.

The connections I stress between the Drawer's subject matter and print matter, and the Notes and advertisements that follow it, may not have been "intended" in the way traditional print culture historians track editorial and authorial intention (see my discussion of Jerome McGann's theories below); but the point here is that by choosing to focus on such standard, socially prescriptive humorous fare, on popular fads (including advertising), and on heavy illustration, the Drawer could not help but produce connections between itself and the promotional material that, following it, drew on the same popular discourses and shared the same ideological commitments. All of these resonances come together again in the ad on the final page of the inside back cover, an ad for Ivory soap that looks just like one of the distinguished Drawer cartoons (figure 15).

The Drawer's familiar, predictable typographical and illustrative techniques, and its repetitive focus on current fads, proper etiquette, and shame, set in relief the powerful connections between the Drawer and advertising that have had such profound meaning for the humor industry. These connections, furthermore, show the force of the practice I put forward prescriptively under the direction "how to read a Drawer." By meshing print culture's object reading (a focus on the *mise en page* that includes such material print issues as typography and layout) with cultural materialism's focus on the textual and historical, I am able to draw out theoretical principles behind the practice of coining humor in *Harper's* that explain the relations between humor and advertising. I am thus able to meet more fully cultural materialism's objectives of restoring to view the material social process behind the process of production of belief in mass culture – and so to trace in detail the sense in which editorial practice is constitutively ideological, even at the level of magazine layout, even in the inclusion of seemingly exceptional anecdotes and jokes. The similarities between the Drawer and its promotional companions at the rear of the magazine are produced by editorial, institutional policies and by a larger social material process that linked the interests of humor practice to capital. These policies and processes converted humor into the companion of advertising through magazine layout, departmental subjects, and print matter. The relations between the humor department and the advertising section in *Harper's*, and the means by which mass culture coins humor, only become clear through analysis of a wider social material process that converted humor into the opportunity for profit and for producing subjects invested in mass culture.

Coining Humor

Much of this chapter, and much of this dissertation, has concerned itself with questions of use and instrumentality at the institutional level of the humor industry, whether academic, as in the case of the history of American Humor Studies, or popular, as in the case of Harper's publishing. In this section, I want to take up questions of use and instrumentality that take place outside of specific institutions like *Harper's* but that are still importantly determined by the practices of those institutions, tracing in broad outline a history of humor practice, in relation to bibliography and specifically to the layout of the Drawer, that can perhaps only ever be rendered in outlines. I do not intend to capture "popular" practice as it has traditionally been defined, that is, I do not intend to trace how people put humor to use in personal ways that escape the intentions of editors and the determinations of capitalism. Instead, I want to historicize the "reading" practices of two people, one a U.S. ad man and the other a Canadian druggist and entertainer, who put humor to use in distinctly professional ways, such that their interactions with popular humor texts and the materials of those texts might be understood as practices of "coining," of turning humor into profit, as much as practices of "reading." The leap in this chapter from a close reading of the Drawer to a speculative theorization of two professionals' reading (and conversational) practices is intended to jar loose the influential sense of reading-as-decoding by drawing seemingly fantastic connections between instrumentalized editorial decisions made in New York and instrumentalized professional decisions made in Hamilton and Winnipeg. Jarring loose such theories by drawing together relations between humor and reading – relations captured in the term "coining" – should, in turn, set in relief the broad reach of the humor industry into personal writings and international, professional performances.

The distinction I draw between "coining" and "reading," I should note here, has more to do with my engagement with print culture studies and cultural materialism than with any limitation I intend to impose on the term "reading," which, of course, could and should include the sense of coining, the sense of turning a text to suit one's pursuit of capital. Janice Radway, in *Reading the Romance*, addresses this multifaceted nature of reading practices, which involve not only pleasurable and political escape from daily household chores but also efforts to earn: many romance readers read-for-capital; that is, part of their motivation for reading the romance is to learn how to write romances to earn profit. Thomas Augst, in *The Clerk's Tale*, defines literacy as a form of cultural capital, identifying the reading, writing, and even debating and lecturing, of young men in the nineteenth-century as efforts to "convert" spare time and access to literacy into the opportunity for developing (morally and economically profitable) character (55-57). The problem I want to address, before tracking two specific instances of "coining" humor in history, is that in some accounts of reading in print culture theory, most notably that of

Jerome McGann, reading is often understood as a simple process of "decoding," rather than a complex social process that registers on innumerable levels of social practice. Thus, while no print cultural theorists deny the complexity of reading practice, nonetheless their terminology often reduces reading to a simple process of decoding, and book publishing and writing as a simple process of encoding. While alternative examples of reading practice in history like those of Radway, Augst and Chartier inform my engagement with coining, working though McGann's negative example will more productively bring out the significance of my sense of coining, my intervention in print culture theory, and my contribution to U.S. humor industry history.

McGann's influential effort to gauge bibliography's impact on processes of literary production and reading identifies "two large signifying codes" that govern the textual transmission of meaning, or what McGann calls "the textual condition." The first and most familiar is "the linguistic code," for which text is an immaterial device. This code is often understood as the primary (and sometimes the only) code at play in the "linguistic event" that is textuality. The second, mostly neglected mode of "symbolic exchange" at play in the textual condition is the "bibliographic code," for which text is a material device for conveying meaning. Editors, unlike most literary critics, grapple with these concerns in every aspect of their professional endeavors to manufacture texts, and necessarily understand the crucial impact material factors have on textual modes of communication. The most succinct expression of McGann's proposed shift in literary hermeneutic practice (in the direction of the bibliographic) is his observation that "meaning is transmitted through bibliographic as well as linguistic codes" (57); and this anticlimactic observation demonstrates a decided limitation in McGann's terminology –

and his method. For, while McGann's theorization of the significance of bibliography has had a profound impact on print culture theory, and has accomplished its primary task of bringing the material text into critical focus, his choice of the term "code" limits his theorization of the material text's role in the processes of literary production and reading.

The limited potential for this terminology to capture the impact of bibliographic materials on diverse reading processes is worth working through, not only for print culture theory in general but also for my project, because such explicitly critical inquiry raises the possibility of reading practices that do not merely interpret the meaning of a materially-constituted text but also turn the text into opportunities for personal and professional advancement. "Code" rightly stresses the reader's active participation in the process of reading and rightly identifies the instrumentalized activity of printers and editors who make points about the text through print decisions ranging from the selection of typeface to the minutiae of layout. Just as crucially, however, "code" wrongly implies a process in which print materials convey a single, intended message that readers decipher, that is, "decode," according to knowable and organized procedures that either succeed or fail to communicate the intended message. Indeed, "code" is valuable terminologically only insofar as it demonstrates McGann's primarily structuralist theorization and historicization of authorial intention. As McGann writes during his discussion of what he calls the two "large" codes, "the point is that authors (and authorial intentions) do not govern those textual dimensions of a work which become most clearly present to us in bibliographic forms" (58). "Code," then, works best in the context of McGann's argument for writing as a knowable, crafted structure that readers investigate and ultimately understand through deliberate processes of deciphering or decoding that respond to deliberate and knowable practices of authorial and editorial encoding. The "code" conceit, however, cannot account for processes that, intended or no, fall outside the fantastic precision of directly intended linguistic and bibliographic communicative transmission.

John Young Taylor's handwritten diary, insofar as it is a record that bears the traces of such transmissions, intentions and accidents, provides a good case for tracking a "coining" practice that turned popular humor into potential profit on a personal and professional level. Taylor was, in 1891-93, a traveling ad man selling "cuts" to businesses in towns across the United States, with a brief excursion or two into Cuba and Canada. "Cuts," as the typewritten didactic sales pitch included in his diary (and cited epigrammatically at the beginning of this chapter) explains, were small electrotyped advertising pieces that could be inserted into the columns of any local newspaper. The scheme was to sell the potential advertiser fifty-two cuts a year, providing at a relatively cheap price a diverse set of advertising material. As the pitch, written as a somewhat confrontational dialogue between "Party" and "Agent," explains,

> A new cut will attract more attention because the reader will become interested and will look for your space. They will, as it were, get the habit of looking up that space so that, when the paper comes into the family the first person looking at the paper will look up your "ad" and then show it to someone else and then the paper will go the rounds of the family. That makes a good advertisement.
>
> Getting the attention of the reader is everything.

Since securing the attention of advertisers is also "everything," the "Agent" quickly turns discussion of the "family" to the discourse of specialization:

> There are cuts and cuts. Cheap cuts. Cheap cuts that do not pay. They simply spoil newspaper space. The Art League cuts are the best that can be made. The Art League people are supplying cuts in Maine, California, North Dakota, South America, Cuba, Canada and some of them abroad. We are not running a department store. We are in the cut business only. It is not a side line.

The discourse of specialization is buttressed by promises of local uniqueness:

> After you get them, the cuts are your property and we sell only one one dealer in your line or lines. Now, we mean that. If I sell you in the Jewellery business, that is, if you take this Jewelry service of ours (I believe there are three others in town), I cannot sell to anyone else. The cuts are your property.

The Art League's scheme, then, was to sell the same Jewelry ad all over the country, but only to one jeweler per local newspaper, thereby forestalling any silly repetition that would render the advertiser's investment practically useless.

Taylor, I speculate, kept this pitch in his diary because he was a driven professional, traveling from town to town in a difficult and demanding line of work that required purposeful clarity of mind and good morale. His diary, then, was not just a record of past events but also a means to achieving personal success in the present and future. Like many people in the nineteenth century, Taylor was driven by an ideology of "success" (an ideology palpable in the language and tone of the sales pitch) that motivated him to align his personal diary with his professional life. As Augst makes clear in his study of clerks' private writing in the nineteenth century, many professional men used diaries to improve their character (a practice they felt was a moral and economic responsibility) and to work out means of earning economic and cultural capital through character. Augst writes that these young men, who were in the process of being socialized into an emerging mass print culture, felt that "through the act of writing, traits as ineffable as habits of thought, social graces, personal appearance, disposition, humor, and autonomy – or their lack – are transformed into means of self-possession" (10). Taylor's diary in many instances continues this tradition of using private writing to work out character and professional habits, which, I will demonstrate, included everything from memorizing sales pitches to memorizing jokes.

Recognizing the important role of professional self-improvement in Taylor's diary helps to gauge the relations between humor, print culture and "coining" in his writing. For, in addition to recording specificities of travel and acquaintance, Taylor kept a record of what he called "Random Notes" in his diary that often took the form of jokes he heard or read on his travels. These "Notes" are most often kept on the handwritten diary's verso pages and are always marked by layout as separate from the regular daily document of events. They seem to be a record of striking phrases or anecdotes Taylor happened across, recorded because they caught his fancy and/or because he felt they could be useful in future conversations, whether professional, personal, or both. What is curious about Taylor's "Random Notes" is that, in recording humor in a different section from the regular diary material, and in recording it in a section named for its randomness, and in recording humorous tales and advertising ink-bites in the same section, Taylor mimicked in his handwritten diary the layout practices of printed magazines like *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, and the *Century* that also marked their humor sections as random (for instance, jokes added to and removed from a drawer at random) and as different from regular editorial material. Here, the ideologically driven layout of the magazine is mimicked by a salesman whose interests, though personal rather than institutional, are strikingly similar to those of magazines. It should be no surprise, then, given my effort to link humor practice in mass culture to capital, that a salesman should attempt to coin humor in the same material (or bibliographic) sense as the magazines he was reading that deliberately worked to educate their readers in how to survive and succeed in the professional culture of the1890s. Notably, Taylor held some literary pretensions; his diary includes some poetry, and some references to contemporary magazine literature. He records that he found Howells's *Lady of Aristook* "splendid," that he would sometimes buy "candy and magazines," and that he read *The Century*. He also enjoyed the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, of whom he writes, "Interesting, and style like Scott." Such pretensions suggest Taylor was familiar with the dominant quality magazine literary discourse, even if they do manifest themselves only in the supposed randomness of his written memories.

The "Random Notes" section is not precisely random insofar as it most often records incidents of significance for Taylor's professional life. At some point, Taylor clearly recognized the section as significant and worthy of explanation, since he writes in a column marked off by a vertical ink line, "The 'Random Notes', etc., in this book are copied from pencil and ink jottings in notebooks used while traveling for the Pictorial League, Tribune Building, New York, 1891-2" (his deliberate reference to pencil and ink suggests the extent to which he understood literacy as determined in part by bibliographic materials). Like the pieces in the Drawer, these notes have been transferred from one medium to another and, while collected in one sense randomly, have also been collected in the context of a professional and institutional life. One page includes many references to sayings of significance for advertisers, such as:

> "My success is owing to liberality in advertising." – Robert Bonner
>
> "The road to fortune is through Printer's Ink." -- P.T. Barnum
>
> "Advertising is to business what steam is to machinery – the grand propelling power." – Macaulay
>
> "All things come to him who waits."

A similar set of notes appears at the back of the diary, marked off, like their "Notes" counterparts, by their print position. These include such phrases as "Let the Customer Talk" and "You cannot afford to be without Pictorial League Cuts," "Not as Costly," and "Of all things which must be done, do those which are most distasteful first. Then you will have something to look forward to with pleasure." Phrases for selling in general, for self improvement and accomplishment, and for selling advertising in particular, populate the "Notes" section, marking Taylor's understanding of his diary as in part a device for selling cuts.

The "Notes" section also includes jokes and humorous anecdotes. Some of these are deliciously vague while others could have easily been printed in departments like the Drawer. Many draw on familiar racist fare, tapping into the contemporary "coon craze" and into racist traditions:

> "An old Virginia darkey, upon seeing an electric street-car for the first time, said: - The Yanks came down here and freed the nigger, and now they have freed de mule."

> "An Irishman told a woman to go to the devil. When being told to apologize, he told her she need not go there."

Like the racist jokes in the January, 1895 Drawer, the "darkey joke" relies on the inability of stereotyped African-Americans to grasp the significance of technology, while the "Irish" joke relies on stereotyped stupidity. Other jokes, such as one about a mischievous boy named "Johnnie" and a "humorous anecdote" by a Nashville, Tennessee preacher, tap into similarly familiar veins of established humor practices as seen in the Drawer. One joke, intriguingly, might escape such familiar fare, but it is only recorded as "the story about the Bishop and his paralyzed leg." Another was of such significance that Taylor recorded it twice, presumably because the first effort was scribbled in a scrunch; this one, drawing on Western humor also included in the January, 1895 Drawer, runs, "No ice in Kentuck; whiskey doesn't freeze."

The case of John Young Taylor's 1891-93 diary productively demonstrates the close relations that obtain between reading practices, print culture, humor and advertising, but not in the sense of coding/decoding so key to McGann's structuralist theorization of the importance of bibliographic materials. Instead, Taylor's diary, with its self-directed and meaningful layout, and its purposeful, professional and personal recording of humor according to layout decisions, suggests how, for readers as for institutions, the process of coining humor is invested in converting humor into economic and cultural capital, and how practices of magazine layout can be taken up in the interests of self-advancement. Taylor emulates the layout of mass magazines in his private writing to practice the relations he must manage between his professional life, his personal life, and mass print culture, and in doing so practices the produced place of humor in his life.

Theorizing Taylor's reading practices against the reading practice implicit to McGann's "code" terminology sets in relief the relations between humor practice, print culture, and profit, aptly highlighting the multiple ways in which readers "coin" humor. The point is that bibliographic materials here are not a code that needs to be decoded, but a material, literary *practice* that needs to be repeated. Thus, although the material structure of magazines is sufficiently powerful to determine the "private" writing practices of professionals who mimic it, that material structure is not a code that requires interpretation or deciphering but instead a professional practice that promises a successful coining (by mimicking the form of the magazine, Taylor hopes to achieve success; that is, he hopes to convert literacy into profit through repetition of a bibliographic form). For Taylor, bibliographic materials are not something you decipher, they are something you do. Furthermore, reading Taylor's diary closely, just as I did the Drawer, for the relations between humor, print culture and advertising, highlights the extent to which readers engage magazine humor and layout in their daily "coining" practices, and perhaps has guided me in the direction Taylor meant it to in his expectation that someone else might read it: I clearly see that he was an up-to-date, striving salesman who read the current literature and emulated mass print culture, and tried to turn this knowledge to account in his daily moral and economic life.

O.S. Mitchell, unlike Taylor, was a professional lecturer (primarily a humorist) who coined what he read into capital through direct participation in the humor industry. Father to writer W.O. Mitchell, who has been called "the Canadian Mark Twain" (*W.O.* 33), O.S. Mitchell, as his Hamilton, Ontario business card notes, was both a "druggist" and an "entertainer." The scrapbook of his professional activities, compiled by his wife and housed at the University of Calgary's special collections, contains many materials relating to Mitchell's performing career, including clippings from newspapers that served as the material for some of his readings. Mitchell's career, and the scrapbook, trace a very real reading practice from the turn of the century that converted newspaper humor pieces into materials for profitable performance. Indeed, since W.O. Mitchell at times used humorous material that his father had recited (*W.O.* 20-21), the scrapbook records a history of humor-coining that crosses three generations and two centuries, a history that indexes the international circulation of U.S. humor and that culminates in the performances of Canada's own "Mark Twain" (21). Unlike Taylor, who coined humor into profitable opportunities as an ad man, O.S. Mitchell coined humor into profitable material specifically for his professional participation in the humor industry.

Like the Drawer and like Taylor, Mitchell understood humor to be constituted by numerous genres, from poetry to anecdotes to jokes. Mitchell's biographers note that "his readings [from 1893-1903] included light verse (such as "Casey at the Bat" and "The Usual Way"), poems (Kipling's "The Mother Lodge" and "The Flag"), Black, Irish, and Scots dialect pieces ("Old Mose – A Gettysburg Incident," "Mr. Dooley on the Irish Questions," "The Heelan' Man's Prayer"), and monologues ("Riding a Bronco" and "St. Peter at the Gate") (22-23). One of these pieces, "Riding a Bronco," was also often performed by Mark Twain when he lectured; Mitchell secured his copy of the text from a reprint in the *Arizona Graphic* (376 n16). Like the Drawer and like Taylor, Mitchell clearly preferred material relating to popular genres, from dialect to "Wild West," presumably because he felt their popularity in print would guarantee their popularity in performance. Mitchell was in fact quite influenced by dialect humor: a promotional circular for a professional humorist, J.H. Cameron, that is pasted into the scrapbook and which was presumably influential as a professional model for Mitchell, notes that "Mr. Cameron offers a repertoire of Humorous and Dramatic Sketches, Impersonations, Songs, Humorous Dialect Stories, Musical Monologues, Patriotic Numbers, Etc., Etc. Suitable for Church Entertainments"; while Mitchell himself was called by his son a "professional Irishman" because his "favourite recitation was 'Mr. Dooley says…" (*W.O.* 23). Because many of these pieces are wrested from newspapers, they include in their print context, just like the Drawer and like Taylor's diary, a plurality of humorous genres and advertising, appropriate perhaps to Mitchell's mixed audiences (he performed at such events as church entertainments, lawn socials, Grocers' association meetings, and at-homes). One three column anecdote, "How Rubinstein Played. A Famous Description of the Great Musician's Playing by an Unknown Author," which is written in thick Western dialect, is followed by an ad for "HOOD'S PILLS," which were "the best after dinner pills" because they could "assist digestion" and "prevent constipation." The ad is in turn followed by a joke, reprinted from the *Galveston News*, which runs, "Some people never learn how to keep out of debt until they lose their credit," and which, as a joke and a piece of self-improving advice, would have fit nicely in Taylor's "Random Notes." What all of this material suggests is that the humor industry's print organization, as evidenced in the Drawer, is reflected in international, professional and personal practices, from the diary-writing of an ad man like Taylor to the professional humor performances of a druggist and entertainer like Mitchell.

In addition to newspapers, magazines were a source for Mitchell's professional humorous lecturing. The scrapbook includes an anonymous two column western dialect piece reprinted from *Harper's Monthly* called "Caleb's Courtship, and What Came of It," and a small cutout from *Lippincott's Magazine* that is titled "In England." "Caleb's Courtship" is reprinted from the December 1889 Drawer, where its author is identified as E.T. Corbett. That a piece from the 1889 Drawer should end up in the repertoire of a Canadian entertainer via reprinting (sans illustrations) in a newspaper (unidentified) from May 10, 1893, is a fine index of the international effects of the growing mass culture. While "Courtship," which relies on western dialect to tell a humorous love story, signals the international and intergeneric (magazine to newspaper to recitation) value of pieces from the U.S. humor industry, the "In England" joke registers the profitability of national stereotypes. This joke runs

> These American jokes seem to be good only in the States, don'cher know. I was dining with an American lawst summer, and after he had finished his fish he said to the waitah: "Bring me a glaws of watah. This fish wants to swim."
>
> Good joke, bah Jove! When I got back to Lunnon I tried it at my first dinnah. We had no fish, so when we got to the veal chops I said, "Waitah, bring me a glaws of watah. This calf wants to drink." And, don'cher know, they laughed at me and not at the joke.

The international flavor of Mitchell's performances, and their American sources, reflect the international nature of Taylor's business and his application of humor to that business, and also reflect the international reach of the Drawer's ability to coin humor in contexts (business and comical performance) mediated by print.

My point in studying Taylor's and Mitchell's humor reading practices – their coinings – is not that they read elite magazines and copied them (even though this may be precisely what they did) but instead that they turned humor industry products, and practices of layout and performance, to account in their personal and professional lives. Their interaction with the print materials of the humor industry was not a mere process of decoding; it was an active process of conversion, of turning reading material into professional opportunity and capital. If the first section of this chapter explains how a cultural materialist might read the Drawer, then the second section explains how readers in history coined it. Together, both sections suggest just how much acts of reading are always acts of coining, and how these acts were in key ways determined in the 1890s by the emerging mass culture.

The Living Gag

James L. Ford, whose humorous critique of Harper's publishing I cited in chapter three, saved some of his most vituperative criticism for that publishing company's flagship humor department, especially in regard to its supposedly outdated humor writers and strikingly inept readers. In one of Ford's tales, a Mr. Rhodes misses a joke "because it is not prefixed with 'Our friend K— sends the 'Drawer' the following good one,' and because its point is not indicated in italics" (54). Here, Drawer readers are not well-dressed, well-educated sophisticates poring over the latest monthly while traveling briskly on the train, as the company itself promoted (see chapter one), but instead sleepy dullards whose tastes are hopelessly out of date and who only recognize jokes if they are accompanied by the proper print invocations and italicized stresses. In another tale, jealous magazine writing rivals undermine a colleague (foreman of the dialect department) by throwing away "a pan of sweepings from the humorous department, designed for Harper's "Editor's Drawer," and replacing them with "real funny jokes" (205). In addition to readers, Ford attacks humor writers when he describes a club of "professional humorists" who write a dying form of "crisp paragraphs." You cannot join this "Association of Old-Time Funny Men" if you are under 55 years of age or if you have "ever been guilty of an original piece of humor" (225). Ford's assertion that Drawer jokes aren't funny, and that their writers and readers are hopelessly out of date, is caught up in the classist and classificatory beliefs which enable him to reject any writing done for money and any reading that naively considers such writing valuable.

Ford's most damning and imaginative tale, however, is that of "The Dying Gag," in which animated jokes parade their trade on stage. A dying, ancient gag, unable even to eat gruel, takes the stage for the last time in a New York theatre. Pondering his long life, he wonders at what happened to his colleagues of past days: "Where are they now?" he asked himself, sadly. "Some are wanderers on the face of the earth, in comic operas. Two of them found ignoble graves in the 'Tourists'' company. Others are sleeping beneath the daisies in Harper's 'Editor's Drawer'" (248). The Old Gag's demise is ridiculously melodramatic:

> "Let be! let be! I must read those old lines once more—it may be for the last time."
>
> And now a solemn hush fell upon the vast audience as a sad-faced minstrel uttered in tear-compelling accents the most pathetic words in all the literature of minstrelsy:

> "And so you say, Mr. Johnson, that all the people on the ship were perishing of hunger, and yet you were eating fried eggs. How do you account for that?"
>
> For one moment a deathlike silence prevailed. Then the Old Gag stepped forward and in clear, ringing tones replied:
>
> "The ship lay to, and I got one."
>
> A wild, heart-rending sob came from the audience and relieved the tension as the Old Gag staggered back into the entrance and fell into the friendly arms that were waiting to receive him.
>
> Sobbing Conundrums bore him to a couch in the dressing-room. Weeping Jokes strove in vain to bring back the spark of life to his inanimate form. But all to no avail.
>
> The Old Gag was dead. (249-50)

Ford's ingenious conceit of animation (which echoes Bangs's own widely known practice of animating objects in his imaginative humor writing) is a powerful condemnation of the hopeless irrelevance of the Drawer in the 1890s.

But it's wrong, and it's wrong because Ford privileges a kind of writing and reading that by definition rejects the popular even as it strives to convert the popular into something more refined and sophisticated. What my close reading of the Drawer, and my case-studies of the diary and professional activities of Taylor and Mitchell, suggest is that even though the Drawer's 1890s humor may have been, by the judgments of Ford in the 1890s, Fischer in the 1960s (remember his collection, *Humor from Harper's*), and Lapham in the 2000s (who includes no Drawer humor in his heavy *Harper's* memorial publication), hopelessly unliterary, it nonetheless had a profound impact on the humor industry and on popular interaction with humor throughout the period of the emergence of mass culture. In fact, the humor industry's 1890s legacy, which includes specific humor writings as well as specific industrial relations between humor, literariness, and advertising, obtains still in the twenty first century, as I hope the introductory sections to all my chapters have suggested, beginning as they do with references to nineteenth century humor practices echoing in scholarly and popular productions of the present time. Ford's Old Gag may be dead, in the sense that its value as a joke has shifted from its original purpose, but the relations between humor, advertising and print culture it captures live on in mass culture, as surely as reading and coining will continue to live and change in the next century.

NOTES

[1] Print culture studies that have influenced my thinking include George Bornstein *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*; Roger Chartier *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*; Robert Darnton *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*; Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*; Jerome McGann *The Textual Condition*; and Janice Radway *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month club, Literary Taste and Middle-Class Desire*.

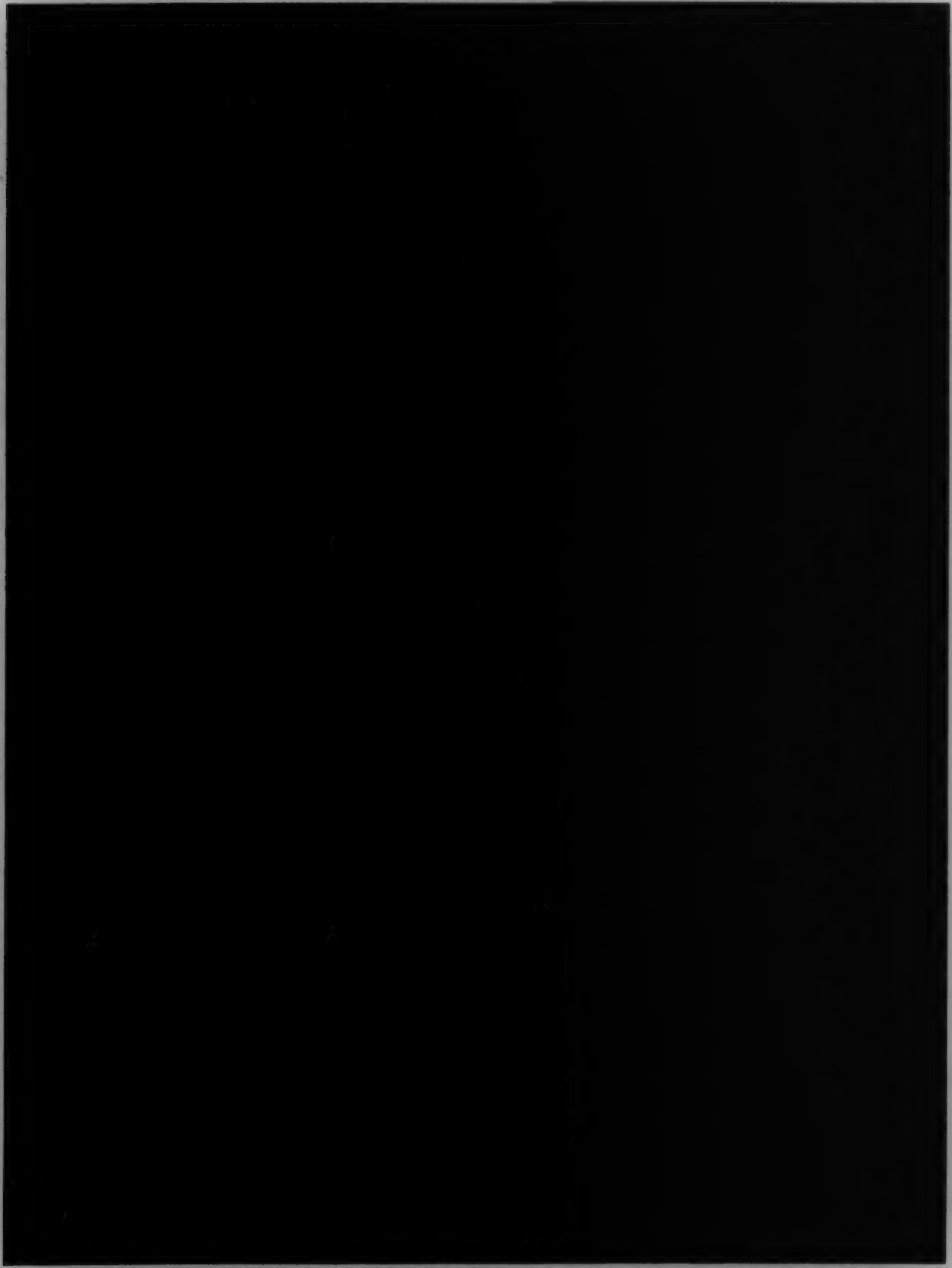
[2] My reading implicitly critiques Theodor Adorno's famous and mostly wrong account of humor's relation to mass culture and advertising. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* he writes:

> The mechanical reproduction of beauty, which reactionary cultural fanaticism wholeheartedly serves in its methodical idolization of individuality, leaves no room for that unconscious idolatry which was once essential to beauty. The triumph over beauty is celebrated by humor–the Schadenfreude that every successful deprivation calls forth. There is laughter because there is nothing to laugh at. Laughter, whether conciliatory or terrible, always occurs when some fear passes. It indicates liberation either from physical danger or from the grip of logic. Conciliatory laughter is heard as the echo of an escape from power; the wrong kind overcomes fear by capitulating to the forces which are to be feared. It is the echo of power as something inescapable. Fun is a medicinal bath. The pleasure industry never fails to prescribe it. It makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practised on happiness. Moments of happiness are without laughter; only operettas and films portray sex to the accompaniment of resounding laughter. In the false society laughter is a disease which has attacked happiness and is drawing it into its worthless totality. To laugh at something is always to deride it, and the life which, according to Bergson, in laughter breaks through the barrier, is actually an invading barbaric life, self-assertion prepared to parade its liberation from any scruple when the social occasion arises. Such a laughing audience is a parody of humanity. Its members are monads, all dedicated to the pleasure of being ready for anything at the expense of everyone else. Their harmony is a caricature of solidarity. What is fiendish about this false laughter is that it is a compelling parody of the best, which is conciliatory. Delight is austere. (89-90)

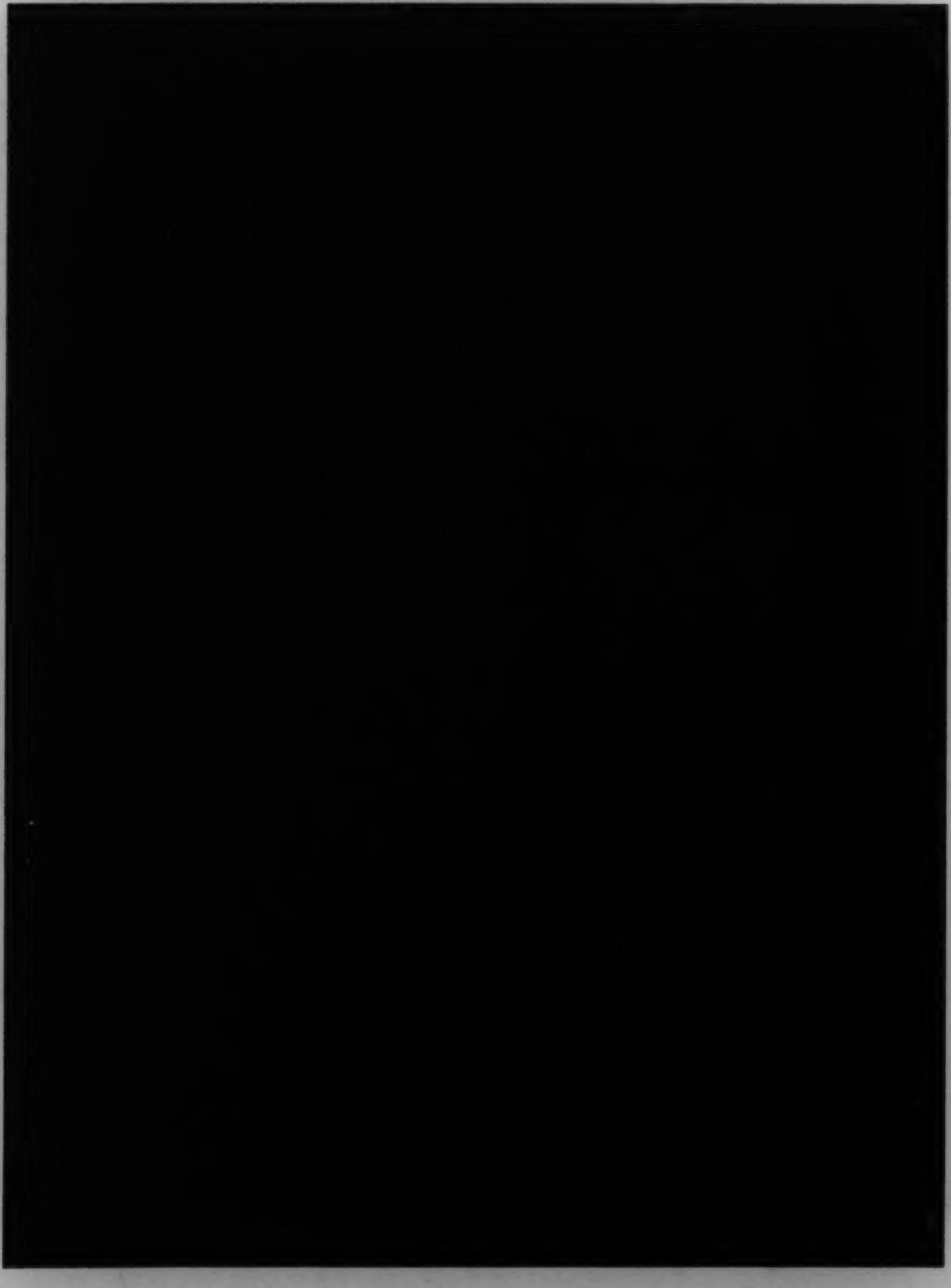
By this point in the dissertation it should be clear just how intellectually bankrupt I think Adorno's universal declarations about laughter (drawn from Henri Bergson's 1900 study *Le Rire*) are. In his account of Adorno's thinking, Shane Gunster writes that Adono's critique of mass culture "is crystallized most perfectly in how the culture industry uses humour. For Adorno, laughter at its best expresses the escape of human beings from power and danger. At its worst, it announces the impossibility of escape and celebrates instead the complete submission to and identification with power" (63). In Adorno's thinking, laughter/humor are the tools of advertising, which mobilizes affect to control identity (236). This universalized approach to humor makes the classic error, corrected by cultural materialism and later by cultural studies, of assuming a too passive subject practicing humor. Williams' statement that "there are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses," and Stuart Hall's assertion that "ordinary people are not dupes" (qtd. in Gunster 171 and 172) are still, in my opinion, the appropriate counter to Adorno's understanding of mass culture, agency, humor, and advertising. I might also add that Adorno's account of humor entirely misses the sense in which austerity, seriousness and solemnity may also be seen as performed and affective responses that play into mass culture. Viewers who stroke their chins in austere silence when they appreciate art do the work of mass culture just as surely as viewers laughing at film comedy. Hopefully, my intervention into cultural materialism, which brings into view the material social process of humor production and humor practice during the emergence of mass culture, will bolster its traditional critique of Adorno.

[3] Here I follow Nancy Glazener's definition of "genre," cited in a footnote to my introduction, as "any 'kind' of writing that is given a name and distinguished from other kinds" (15).

Chapter Four – Figure One



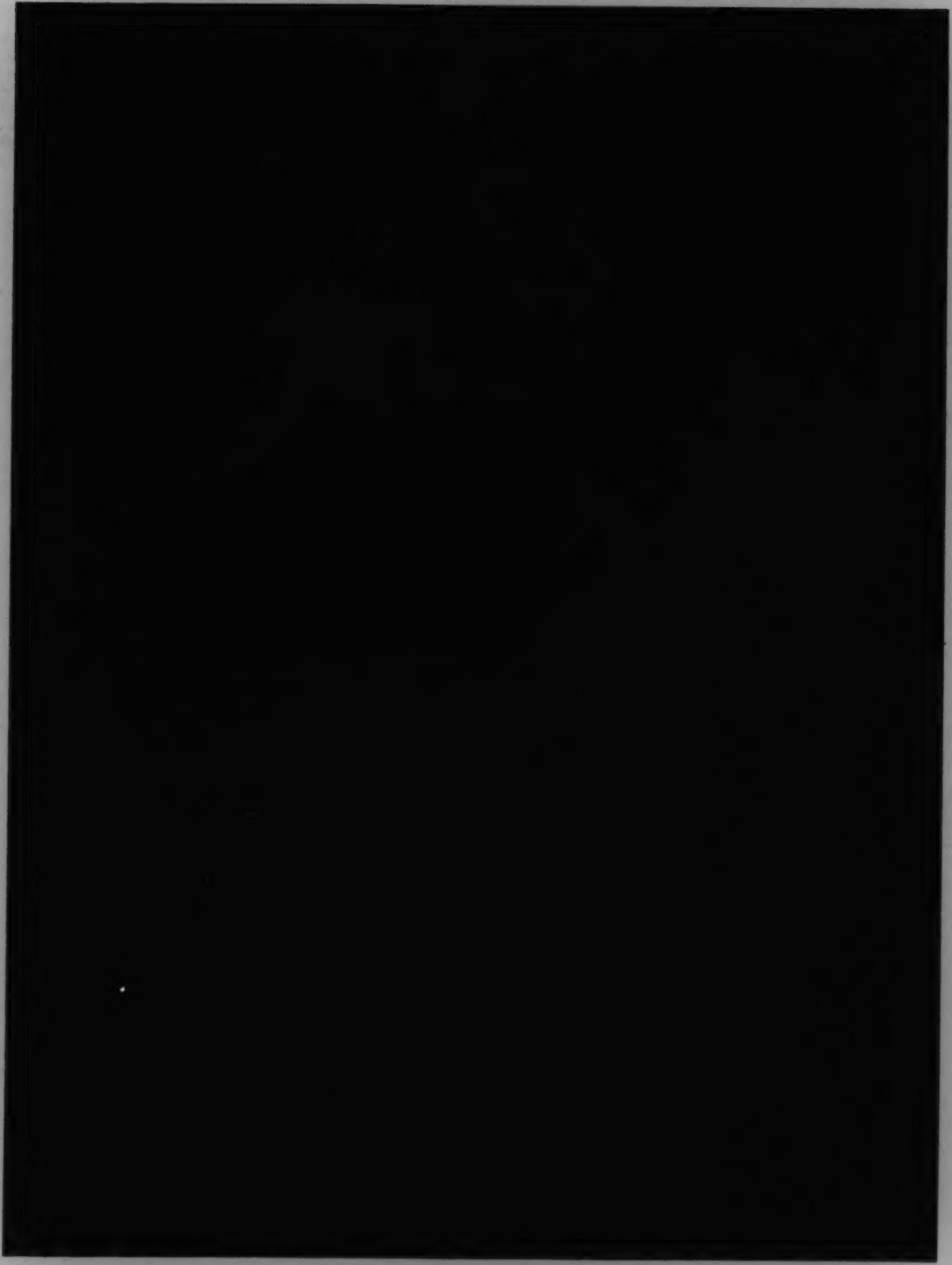
Chapter Four – Figure Two



Chapter Four – Figure Three

Chapter Four – Figure Four

Chapter Four – Figure Five



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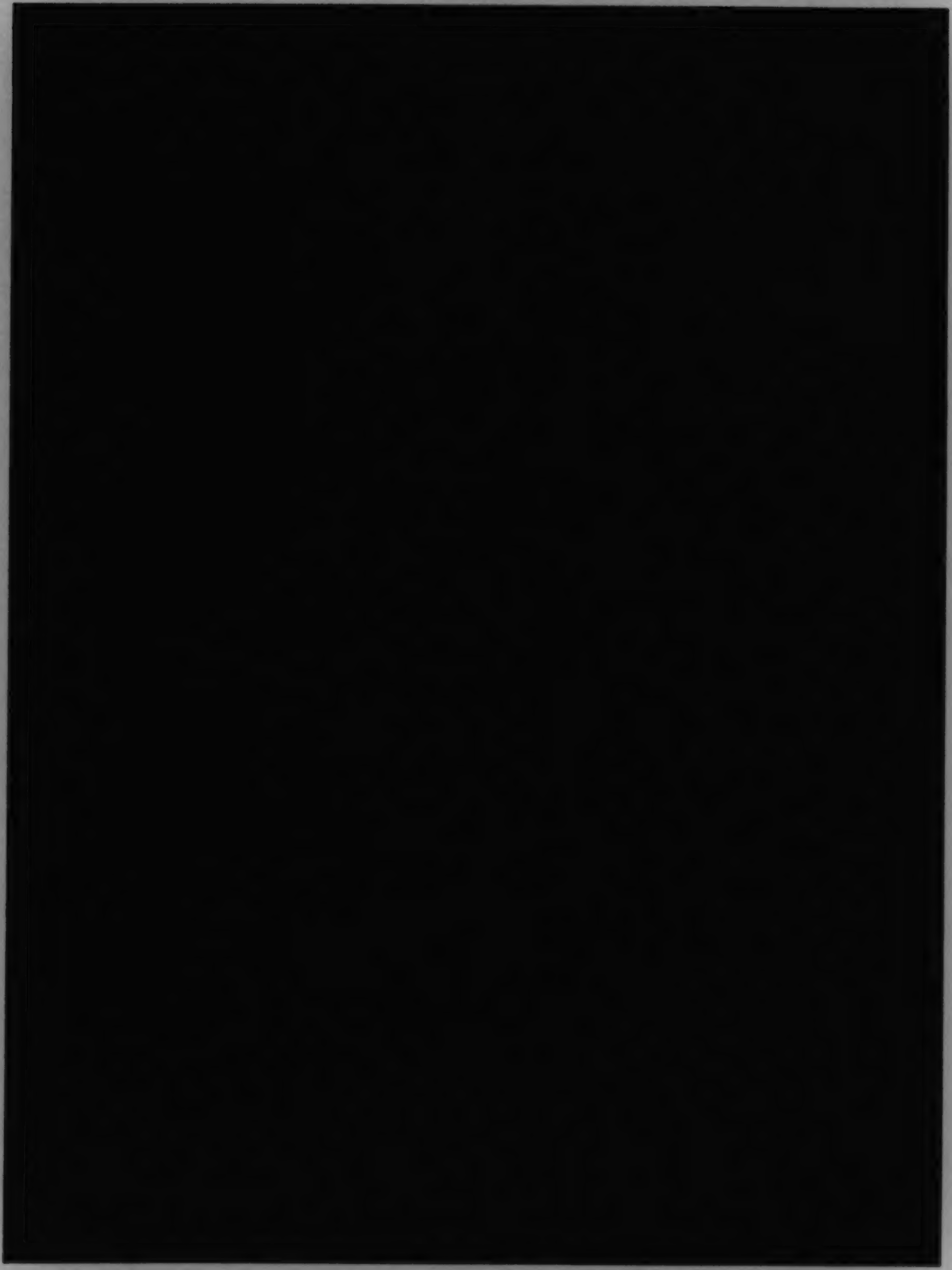

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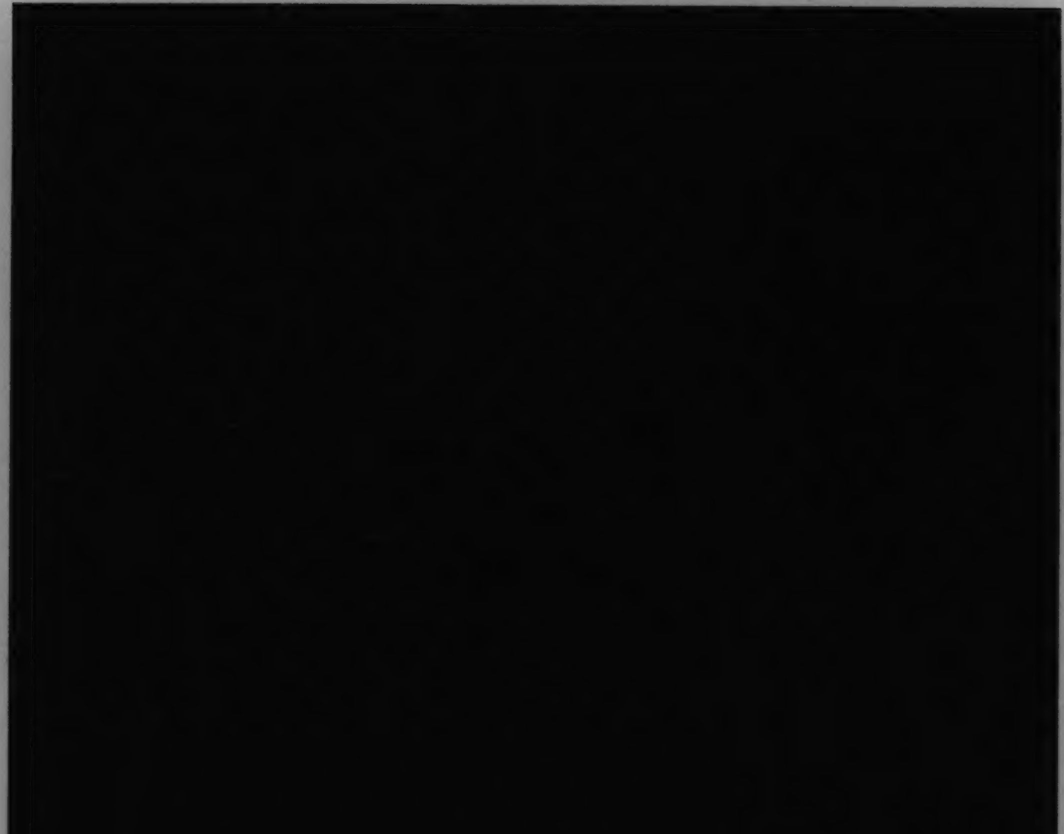

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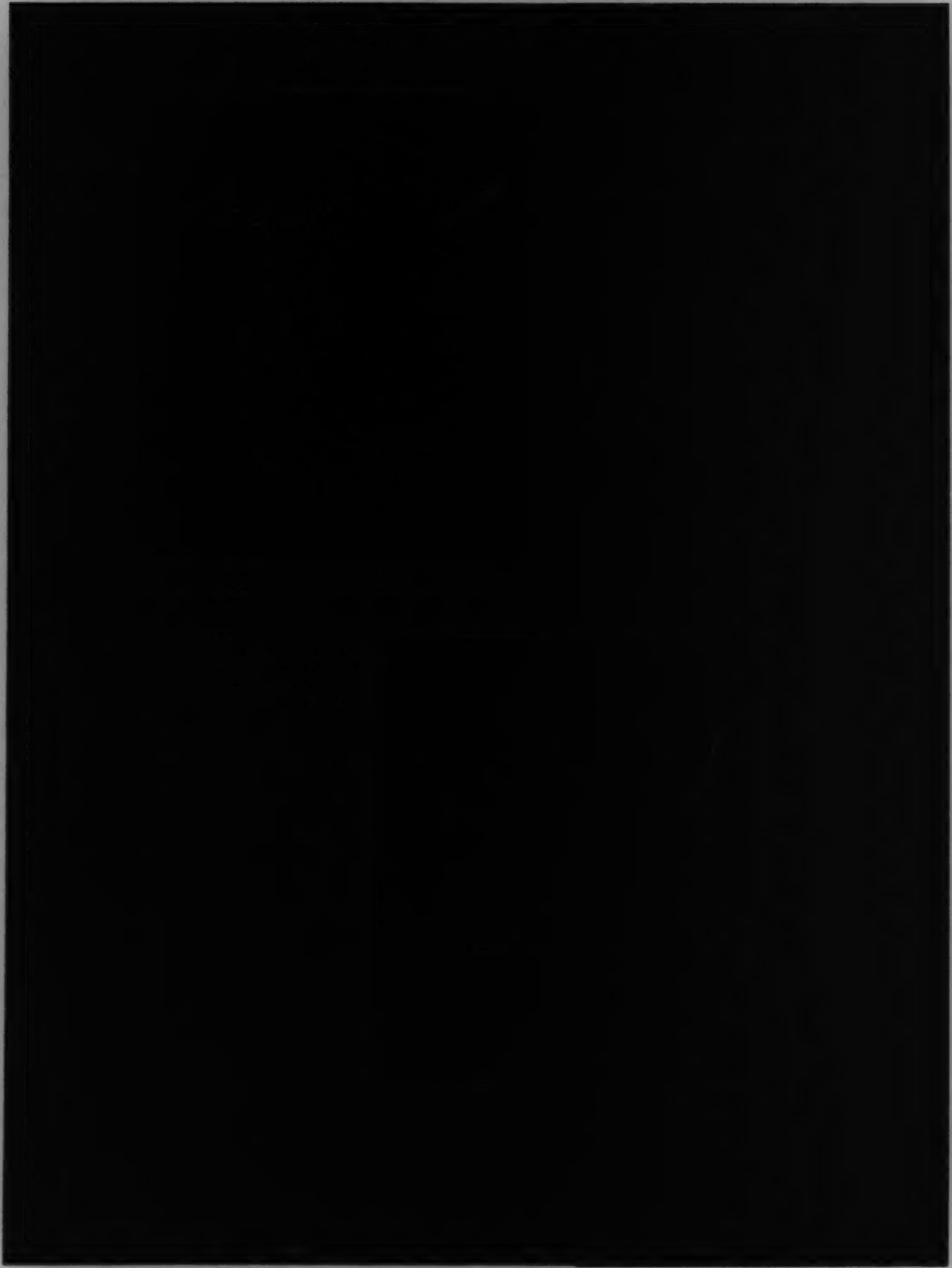

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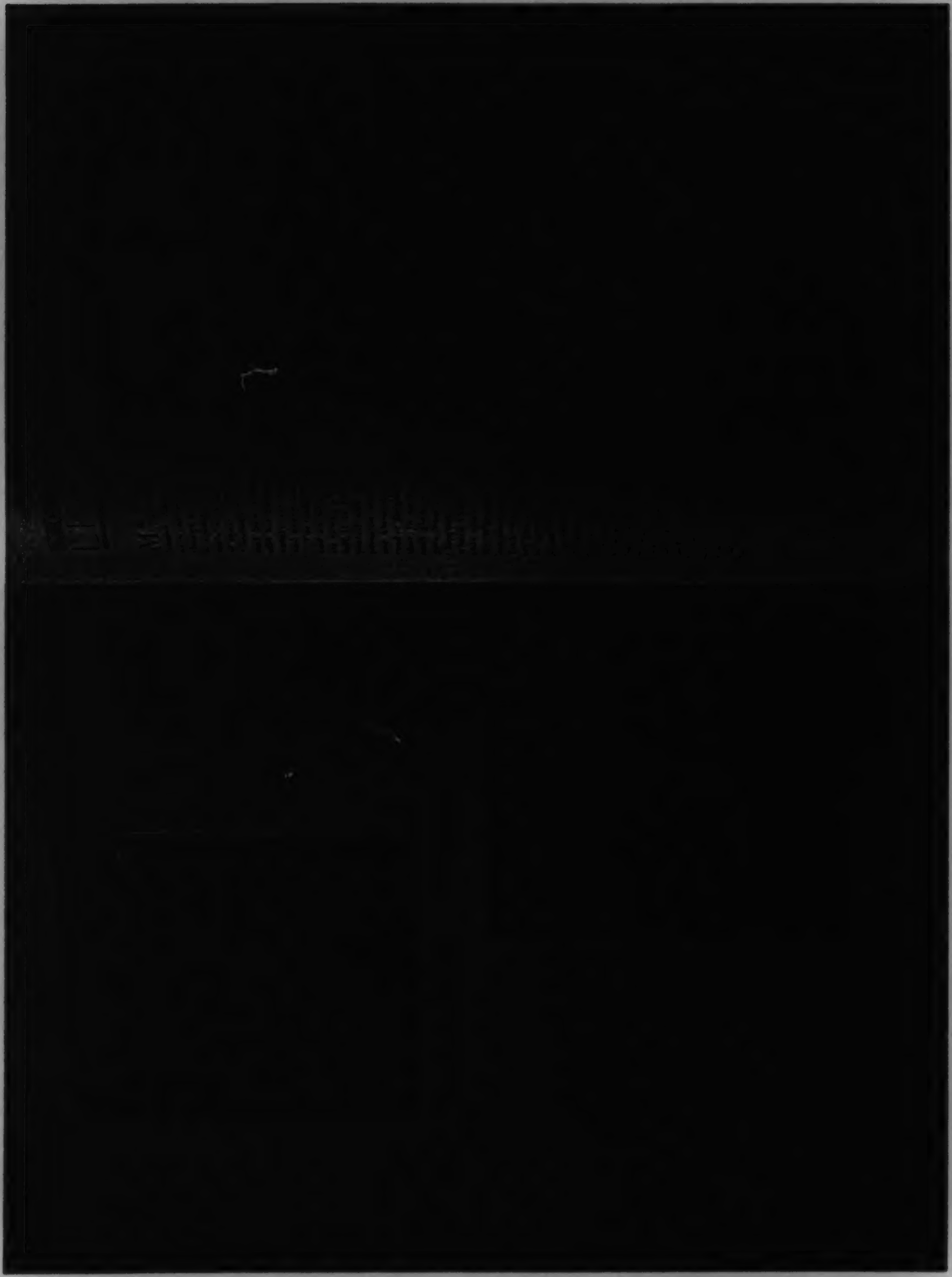

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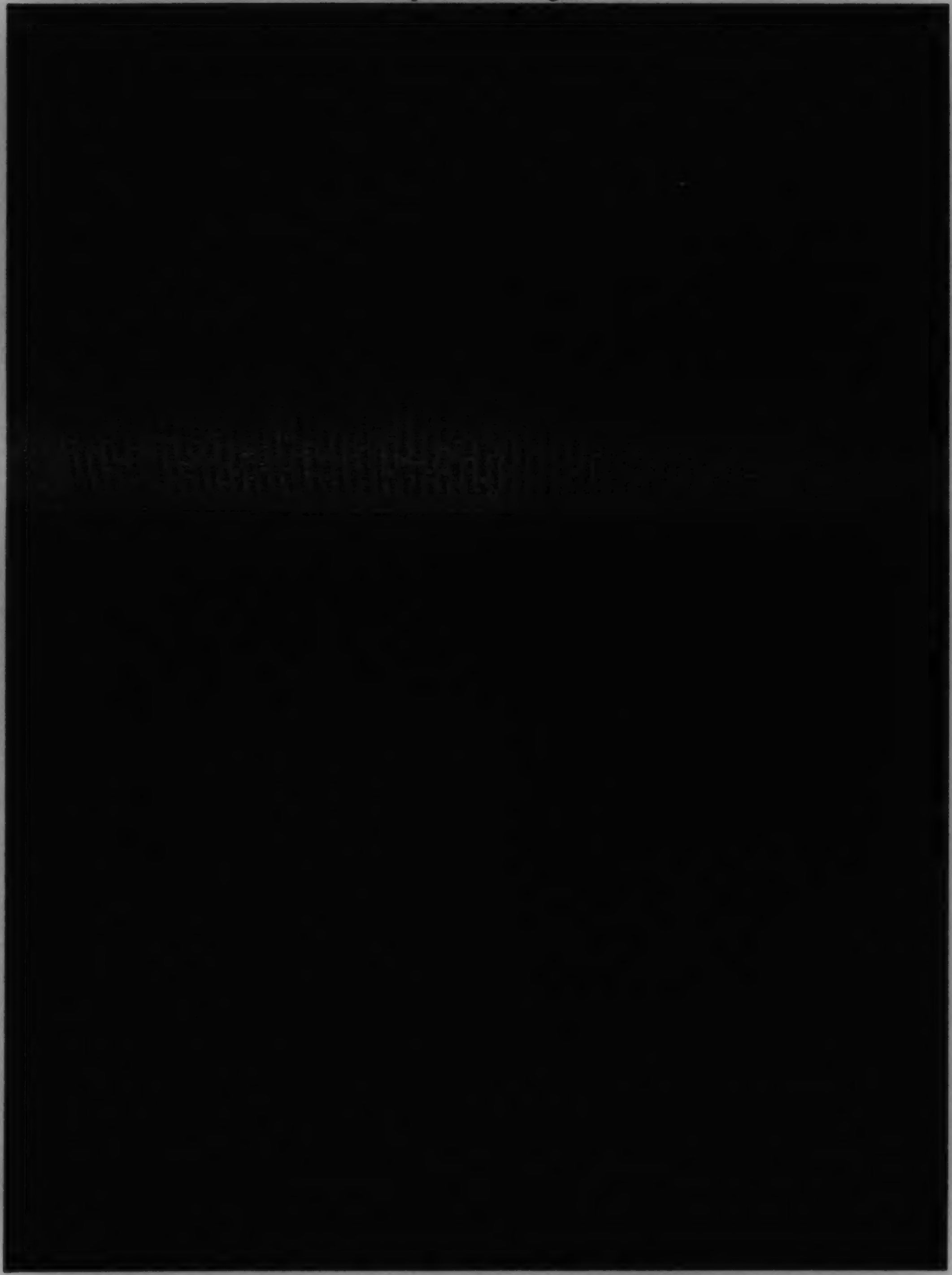
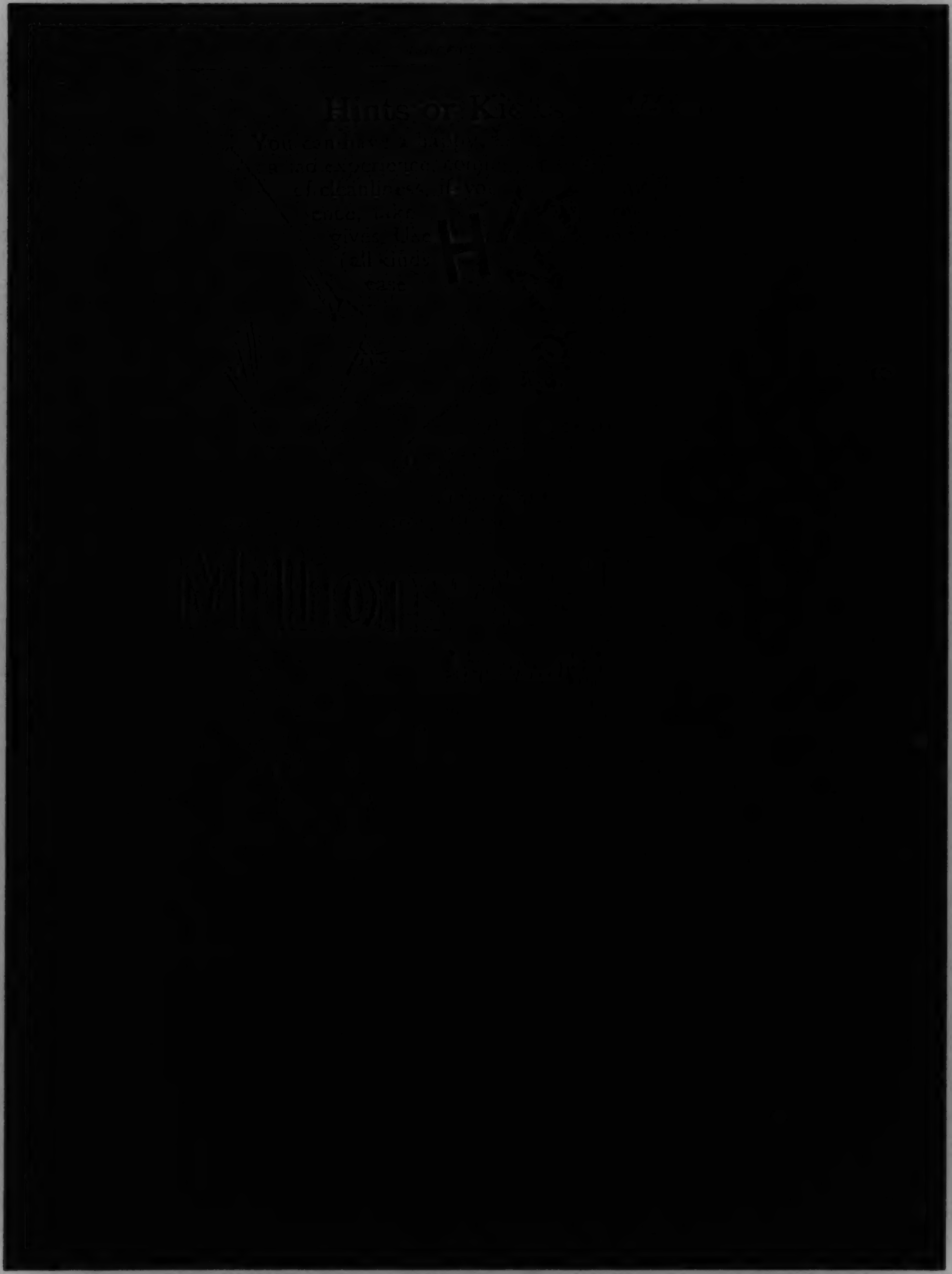
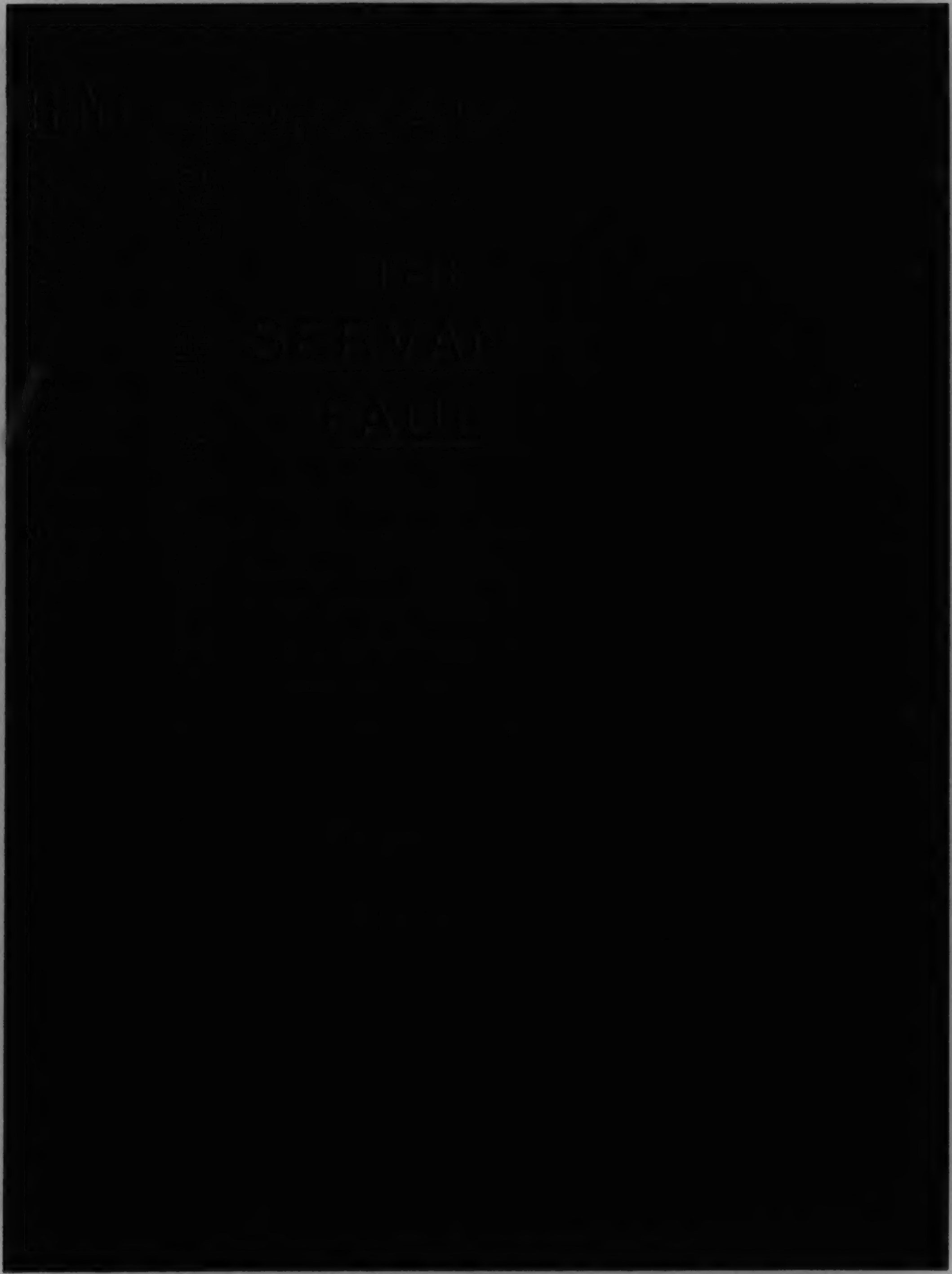


Chapter Four – Figure Eleven

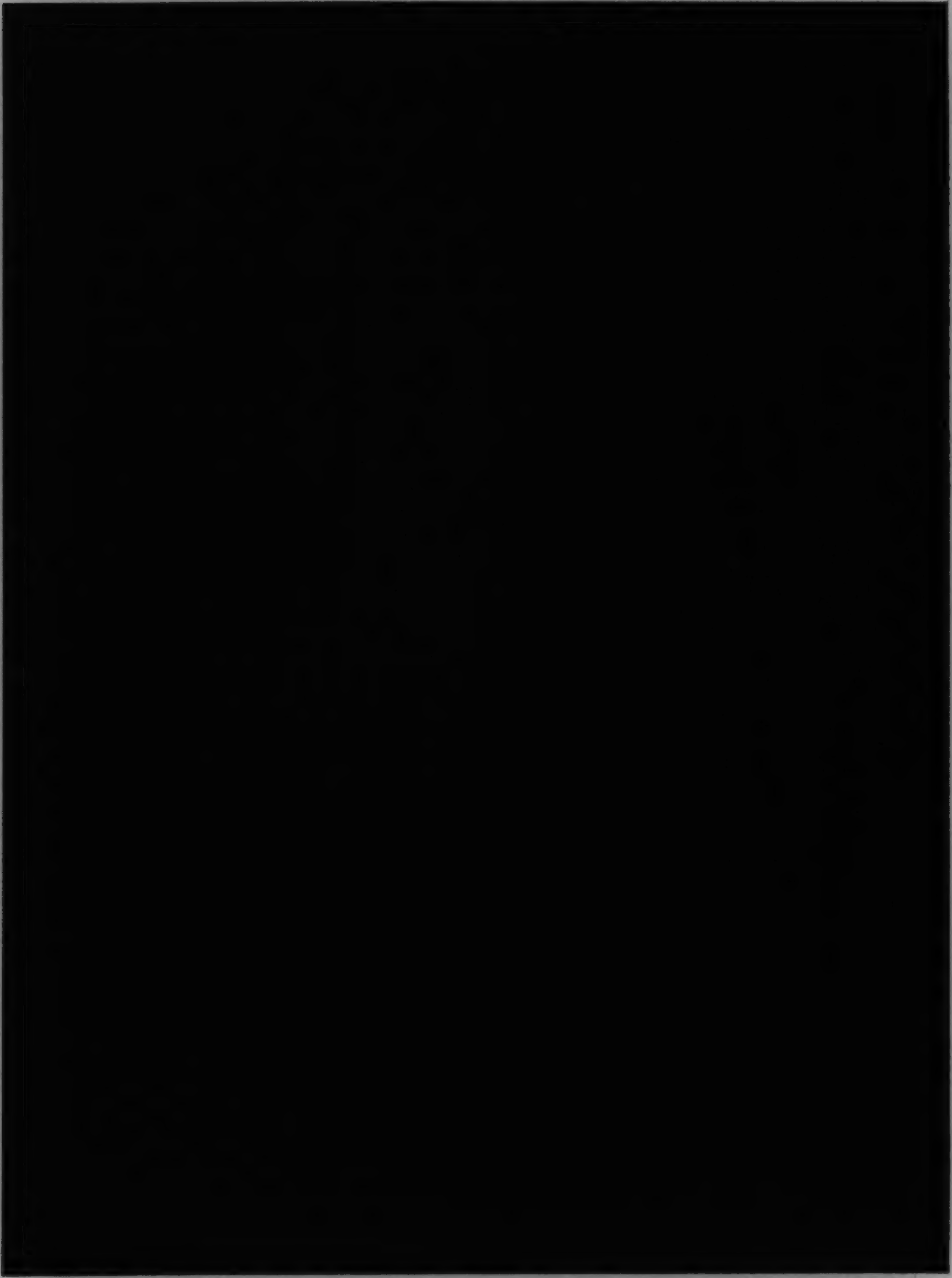
Chapter Four – Figure Twelve



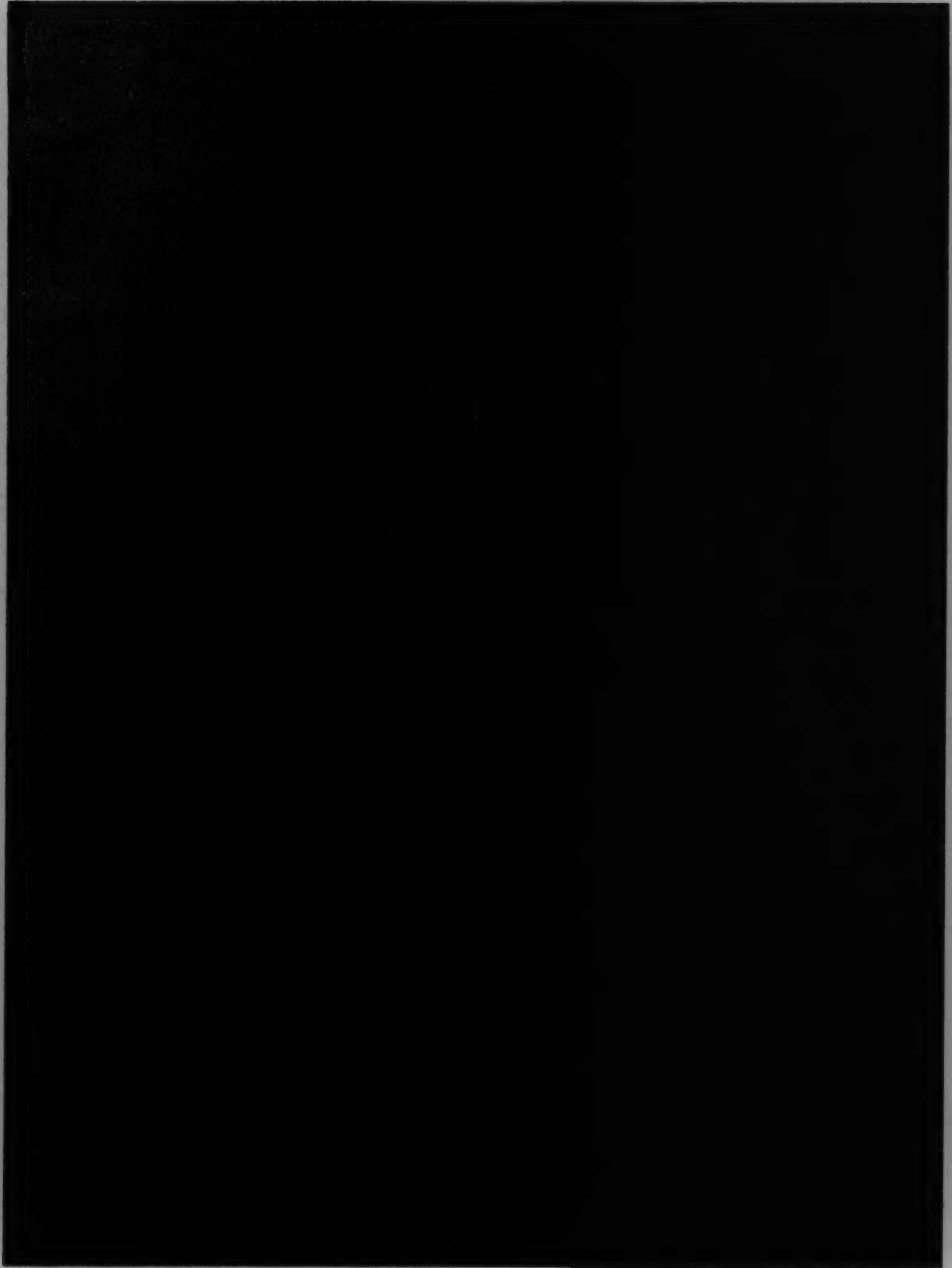
Chapter Four – Figure Thirteen



Chapter Four – Figure Fourteen



Chapter Four – Figure Fifteen



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